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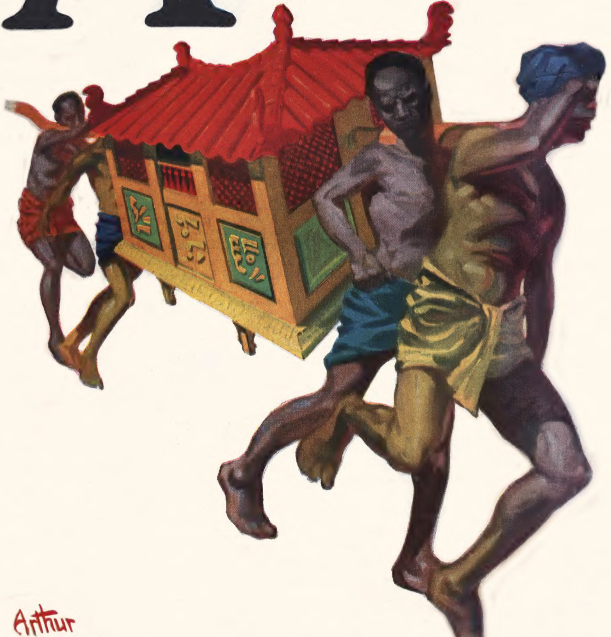

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# Adventure

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## BEFORE MARQUETTE By KATHRENE and ROBERT PINKERTON

Who gave you "Penitentiary Post," "The White Indians," and other tales of the Northland.

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**THE DOUBLE SCOOP** *A Complete Novelette*
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A tale of stirring days in turbulent Morocco.

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## MID-AUGUST NUMBER

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# ALAMUT

## A COMPLETE NOVELETTE by H.A.LAMB

*Author of "Tal Taulai Khan," "Dorgan's Devil-Devil," etc.*

IT WAS the year of the lion at the very end of the sixteenth century when Khlit guided his horse into Astrakan. No sentries challenged him in the streets of Astrakan, for the Cossacks were masters here and no Cossack would dishonor himself by taking precautions against danger. There were many Mohammedans in the streets of Astrakan, but it was evening and the followers of Allah were repeating the last of their prayers, facing, as was the law, toward the city of Mecca.

Sitting his steppe pony carelessly, Khlit allowed the beast to take its own course. The night, in Midsummer, was warm and his heavy *svitza* was thrown back on his high shoulders. A woolen cap covered one side of his gray head, and his new pair of costly red Morocco boots were smudged with tar to show his contempt for appearances. Under his shaggy mustache a pipe glowed and by his side hung the strangely shaped saber which had earned the Cossack the name of "Khlit of the Curved Saber."

Khlit rode alone, as he had done since he left the Siech, where Cossack leaders had said that he was too old to march with the army of the Ukraine. He paid no attention to the sprawling, drunken figures of Cossacks that his horse stepped over in the street. Clouds of flies from fish houses, odorous along the river front, buzzed around him. Donkeys driven by naked Tatar urchins passed him in the shadows. Occasionally the glow from the open front of an Ispahan rug dealer's shop showed him cloaked Tatars who swaggered and swore at him.

Being weary Khlit paid no heed to these. A dusty armorer's shop under an archway promised a resting-place for the night, and here he dismounted. Pushing aside the rug that served as a door he cursed as he stumbled over the proprietor of the shop, a Syrian who was bowing a yellow face over a purple shawl in prayer.

*"Lailat el kadr,"* the Syrian muttered, casting a swift side glance at the tall Cossack.

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Khlit did not know the words; but that night thousands of lips were repeating them—*lailat el kadr*, night of power. This was the night which was potent for the followers of the true faith, when the *dhinns* smiled upon Mohammed, and Marduk was hung by his heels in Babylon. It is so written in the book of Abulghazi, called by some Abulfarajii, historian of dynasties.

It was on such a night of power, say the annals of Abulghazi, that Hulagu Khan, nephew of Ghengis Khan and leader of the Golden Horde overcame the citadel of Alamut, the place of strange wickedness, by the river Shahrud, in the province of Rudbar. It was on that night the power of Hagen ben Sabbah was broken.

But the power of Hagen ben Sabbah was evil. Evil, says Abulghazi, is slow to die. The wickedness of Alamut lived, and around it clung the shadow of the power that had belonged to Hagen ben Sabbah—a power not of god or man—who was called by some sheik, by others the Old Man of the Mountain, and by himself the prophet of God.

It was also written in the book of Abulghazi that there was a prophecy that the waters of the Shahrud would be red with blood, and that the evil would be hunted through the hidden places of Alamut. A strange prophecy. And never had Khlit, the Cossack of the Curved Saber, shared in such a hunt. It was not of his own seeking—the hunt that disclosed the secret of Alamut. It was chance that made him a hunter, the chance that brought him to the shop of the Syrian armorer, seeking rest.

So it happened that Khlit saw the prophecy of Abulghazi, who was wise with an ancient wisdom, come to pass—saw the river stair flash with sword blades, and the banquet-place, and the treasure of Alamut under the paradise of the Shadna.

"*Lailat el kadr*," chanted the Syrian, his eye on the curved blade of Khlit, "Allah is mighty and there is no god but he."

"Spawn of Islam," grunted Khlit who disliked prayer, "lift your bones and find for me a place to spend the night. And food."

The Cossack spoke in Tatar, with which language he was on familiar terms. The response was not slow in coming, although from an unexpected quarter. A cloaked figure rose from the shadows behind the one lamp which lighted the shop and confronted him. The cloak fell to the floor and disclosed a sturdy form clad in a fur-tipped tunic under which gleamed a coat of mail, heavy pantaloons, and a peaked helmet. A pair of slant, bloodshot eyes stared at Khlit from a round face.

Khlit recognized the newcomer as a Tatar warrior of rank, and noted that while the other was short, his shoulders were wide and arms long as his knees. Simultaneously Khlit's curved saber flashed into view, with the Tatar's scimiter.

As quickly, the Syrian merchant darted into a corner. Cossack and Tatar, enemies by instinct and choice, measured each other cautiously. Neither moved, waiting for the other to act. Khlit's pipe fell to the floor and he did not stoop to pick it up.

"Toctamish!"

It was a woman's voice, shrill and angry that broke the silence. Khlit did not shift his gaze. The Tatar scowled sullenly, and growled something beneath his breath.

"Toctamish! Fool watch dog! Is there no end to your quarreling? Do your fingers itch for a sword until you forget my orders?"

The curtains were pushed aside from a recess in the shop, and out of the corner of his eye Khlit saw a slender woman dart forward and seize the Tatar by his squat shoulders. Toctamish tried in vain to throw off the grip that pinned his arms to his side.

"One without understanding," the Tatar growled, "here is a dog of a Cossack who would rather slay than eat. This is the Khlit I told of, the one with the curved sword. Are you a child at play?"

"Nay, you are the child, Toctamish," shrilled the woman, "for you would fight when the Cossack would eat. He means no harm. Allah keep you further from the wine cask! Put up your sword. Have you forgotten you are man and I am mistress?"

To Khlit's amusement Toctamish, who whether by virtue of wine or his natural foolhardiness was eager to match swords, dropped his weapon to his side. Whereupon Khlit lowered his sword and confronted the woman.

Beside the square form of Toctamish, she looked scarcely bigger than a reed of the river. A pale-blue reed, with a flower-face of delicate olive. Above the blue garment which covered her from foot to throat, her black hair hung around a face which arrested Khlit's attention. Too narrow to be a Tatar, yet too dark for a Georgian, her head was poised gracefully on slender shoulders. Her mouth was small, and her cheeks tinted from olive to pink. The eyes were wide and dark. Under Khlit's gaze she scowled. Abruptly she stepped to his side and watched him with frank curiosity.

"Do you leave courtesy outside when you enter a dwelling, Cossack?" she demanded. "You come unbidden, with dirty boots, and you flourish your curved sword in front of Toctamish who would have killed you because he is crafty as a Kurdish *farsang*, and feared you. I do not fear you. You have a soiled coat and you carry a foul stick in your mouth."

Khlit grunted in distaste. He had small liking for women. This one was neither Tatar nor Circassian nor Georgian, yet she spoke fair Tatar.

"Devil take me," he said, "I had not come had I known you were here, oh, loud voiced one. I came for food and a place to sleep."

"You deserve neither," she retorted, following her own thoughts. "Is it true that you are Khlit, who fought with the Tatars of Tal Taulai Khan? Toctamish is the man of Kiragai Khan who follows the banners of Tal Taulai Khan and he has seen you before. It seems he does not like you. Yet you have gray hair."

The Cossack was not anxious to stay, yet he did not like to go, with Toctamish at his back. While he hesitated, the girl watched him, her lips curved in mockery.

"Is this the Wolf you told me of?" said she to Toctamish. "I do not think he is the one the Tatar fold fear. See, he blinks like an owl in the light. An old, gray owl."

Toctamish made no reply, eying Khlit sullenly. Khlit was fast recovering from his surprise at the daring of this woman, of a race he had not seen before, and very beautiful, who seemed without fear. The daughter of a chieftain, he meditated; surely she was one brought up among many slaves.

"Aye, daughter," he responded moodily. "Gray, and therefore forbidden to ride with the free Cossacks, my brothers of the Siech. Wherefore am I alone, and my sword at the service of one who asks it. I am no longer a Cossack of Cossacks but one alone."

"I have heard tales of you." The black-eyed woman stared at him boldly, head on one side. "Did you truly enter here in peace, seeking only food?"

"Aye," said Khlit.

"Wait, then," said she, "and the nameless one whose house this is will prepare it for you. Meanwhile, sheath the sword you are playing with. I shall not hurt you."

Motioning Toctamish to her side, the woman of the blue cloak withdrew into a corner of the curtained armorer's shop. The Cossack, who had keen eyes, noted that the Syrian was bending his black-capped head over a bowl of stew which he was stirring in another corner. No others, he decided, were in the shop.

Toctamish seemed to like his companion's words little. He muttered angrily, at which the girl retorted sharply. Khlit could not catch their words, but he guessed that an argument was taking place, at which the Tatar was faring ill. The argument seemed to be about himself. Also, he heard the name Berca repeated.

Although Khlit was not of a curious nature, the identity of the girl puzzled him. With the beauty of a high-priced slave, and the manner of a king's daughter, she went unveiled in a land where women covered their faces from men. Moreover she was young, being scarce eighteen, and of delicate stature.

Khlit bethought him, and it crossed his memory that he had heard of dark-haired and fair-skinned women of unsurpassed beauty whose land was at the far end of the Sea of Khozar, the inland, salt sea. They were Persians, of the province of Rudbar. Yet, fair as they were in the sight of men, none were bought as slaves. Berca, if that were her name, might well be one of these. If that was the case, what was she doing in Astrakan, alone save for one Tatar, who while he was a man of rank and courage, was not her equal?

## II

THE Cossack's meditation was interrupted by the girl, who motioned to the Syrian to set his stew before Khlit.

"Eat," she cried impatiently, pointing to the steaming bowl. "You are hungry, Father of Battles, and I would speak with you. A man speaks ill on an empty belly, although a woman needs not food nor wine to sharpen her wits. Eh, look at me and say, Father of Battles, is it not true I am beautiful, that men would die for me? It is given to few to look at me so closely."

She stepped near the Cossack, so the edge of her silk garment touched his shaggy face where he crouched over the bowl. Khlit sniffed, and with the odor of lamb stew he smelled, although he knew not its nature, the scent of rose leaves and aloes. He dipped his hand into the bowl and ate.

"Speak, Khlit, Cossack boor," shrilled the woman, shaking his shoulder impatiently, "and say whether it is in your mind I am beautiful. Other men are not slow to say that Berca of Rudbar and Kuhistan is shapely, and tinted as the rose."

Khlit's hand paused midway to his mouth.

"Toctamish has a handsome harlot," he said and swallowed.

The girl stepped back hastily.

"Clown!" she whispered softly. "Nameless one of a dog's breeding. You shall remember that word. It was in my mind to bid you come with me, and be companion to Toctamish——"

"Am I a man for a Tatar's wench?" Khlit was making rapid inroads into the stew.

"Nay, a boor of the steppe. Remember, your speech is not to be forgotten. I am a chief's daughter, with many horsemen."

Berca was watching the Cossack half-angrily, half-anxiously. Toctamish moved his bulk to the bowl, regarding the disappearing contents with regret.

"How can one man be courteous, Berca of Rudbar," he asked gruffly, "when the tribe is without breeding? It were better to cut the throat of this *caphar*, dog without faith, before he ate of our bread and salt."

"Nay, eat also of the food, Toctamish," said Berca, "and let me think."

The Tatar's brown face wrinkled in distaste.

"Am I to share bread with a *caphar?*" he snarled. "Truly, I promised to obey you, but not thus. Bid the Cossack be gone and I will eat. Otherwise he will be brother in arms, and his danger shall be my danger."

Berca stamped her slippered foot impatiently.

"Has Allah given me a donkey to follow me? Eat your share of the stew, Toctamish, and cease your braying. Is it not written in the Koran that the most disagreeable of voices is the voice of asses."

Toctamish remained sullenly silent. He was very hungry. Likewise, Khlit was an enemy of his blood.

"Eat, Flat-Face," chuckled Khlit, who was beginning to enjoy himself, "the stew is rarely made. But the bottom of the bowl is not far off."

The odor of the food tormented the Tatar. And Berca, for reason of her own, allowed him no chance to back away from the bowl. Finally, in desperation, he squatted opposite Khlit and dipped his hand into the stew.

"Remember the law, Flat-Face," guffawed Khlit, as the other ate greedily. "We have shared bread and salt together—I would give a hundred ducats for a mouthful of wine."

"It is not I who will forget, *caphar*," retorted Toctamish with dignity. Tugging at his girdle, he held out a small gourd. "Here is *arak;* drink heartily."

"Aye," said Khlit.

He had tasted the heady mares' milk of the Tatars before and he sucked his mustache appreciatively after the draft. Pulling pipe and tobacco from a pouch he proceeded to smoke.

"Observe," said Toctamish to Berca, to show that he was not softened by what has passed, "that the *caphar* dog is one who must have two weeds to live. He sucks the top of one and drinks the juice of the other."

"Still your tongue," said Berca sharply, "and let me think."

She had seated herself cross-legged by the bowl, and her bird-like glance strayed from Khlit to Toctamish. The Cossack, engrossed in his pipe, ignored her.

"Why did you name me a harlot?" she asked abruptly, a flush deepening the olive of her cheeks.

"Eh, I know not, Sparrow. Devil take it, a blind man would see you are not kin to Toctamish. He is not of your people. And there is no old woman at hand to keep you out of mischief. You have said you were a chief's daughter. If that is not a lie. then the chief is dead."

The girl's eyes widened, and Toctamish gaped.

"Have you a magician's sight, *caphar?*" she cried. "It is true that the sheik, my father is dead. But I did not tell you."

"Yet you are alone, Berca, across the

Sea of Khozar, without attendants. A wise sheik will keep his girl at home, except when she is sent to be married. Is it not true that another sent you out of Rudbar?"

Berca's dark eyes closed and she rested her chin quietly on her folded hands. One hand she thrust into the folds of her cloak at the throat and drew it out clasped around a small object which hung by a chain from her slender neck. Opening her fingers she disclosed a sapphire of splendid size and brilliancy, set in carved gold. The jewel was of value, and appeared to be from the work-shops of skilled jewelers of Tabriz. Khlit eyed it indifferently and waited.

"It is true that another sent me from Rudbar, Khlit," said Berca softly, "and it was to be married. The one who sent me sent also some slaves and an attendant. He swore that a certain chief, a khan of the Kallmarks had asked me for his wife, and I went, not desiring to stay in Rudbar after my father died."

"The Kallmarks?" Khlit frowned. "Why, you are a Persian, and the Kallmark Tatars make war on Persians as did their fathers. A marriage would be strange. Eh, who sent you?"

Berca lowered her voice further and glanced at the Persian armorer who was snoring in his corner.

"One it was who is better not named," she whispered. "He is neither sheik nor khan. Listen, Cossack. This is a jewel of rare value. It has no mate this side of Damascus. Would you like to own it?"

"Aye," said Khlit indifferently, "at what price?"

"Service."

"Do you want another Toctamish? Buy him in the streets of Astrakan. Is a free Cossack to be bought?"

"Nay, Khlit," whispered Berca leaning close to him until her loose curls touched his eyes, "the service is for one who can use his sword. We heard in Tatary how you escaped from Tal Taulai Khan and his myriad horsemen. Men say that you are truly the father of battles. I have work for such a one. Listen! I was sent from Rudbar to Kiragai Khan, up the Sea of Khozar, and across the Jaick River, with one attendant and a box which the attendant said held jewels and gold bars for my dowry. I came to the court of Kiragai Khan——"

"Bah, Sparrow," Khlit yawned sleepily, "you are tiresome. I want sleep, not words. In the morning——"

"We will be gone from Astrakan." Berca held up the sapphire. "You must listen, Cossack. I told Kiragai Khan my mission, for there were no others to speak, and opened the box in the hands of the attendant. The jewels were poor pearls and no gold was in the box. Then Kiragai Khan, before whom I had unveiled my face, laughed and said that he had not sent for me. At first it came to my mind that it was because the jewels were worthless. But it was the truth."

"Aye," said Toctamish suddenly, "it was the truth."

"I went quickly from the country of Kiragai Khan, aided by Toctamish, who pitied me when others tried to sell me a slave—of a race that are not slaves. At Astrakan we learned the whole truth, for here word came to us that the one who sent me in marriage had killed my father. I was sent to be out of the way, for it would not do to sell one of my blood as slave. Such is not the law. He who killed my father heeds no law, yet he is crafty."

"Then," inquired Khlit, "you would slay him? Give Toctamish a dagger and a dark night and it is done."

Berca shook her head scornfully.

"No dagger could come near this man," she said bitterly. "And he is beyond our reach. He has many thousand hidden daggers at his call. His empire is from Samarkand to Aleppo, and from Tatary to the Indian Sea. He is more feared than Tal Taulai Khan, of the Horde."

"Then he must be a great sheik," yawned Khlit.

"He is not a sheik," protested Berca, and her eyes widened. "And his stronghold is under the ground, not on it. Men say his power lies in his will to break all laws, for he has made his followers free from all law. What he wants, he takes from others. And he is glad when blood is shed. Do you know of him?"

"Aye," said Khlit, grinning, "the steppe fox."

"They call you the Wolf," pleaded Berca, "and I need your counsel and wisdom. This man I am seeking has a name no one makes a jest of—twice. He is called by some the arch prophet, by others the Old Man of the Mountain, and by others the *Shadna* of the Refik folk. He is the head of an empire that lays tribute on every city in Persia, Kurdistan, Khorassan, Syria and Anatolia. If Allah decreed that I should be his death I should be content."

"More likely dead," responded Khlit. "Truly, if these are not lies, your Old Man of the Mountain must be a good fighter and I would cross swords with him. Can you show him to me?"

"Aye, Khlit," said Berca eagerly, "if you come with me. There is the sapphire if you will come to Rudbar with me."

Khlit stretched his tall bulk lazily.

"One way is as good as the other to me, if there is fighting," he muttered sleepily. "Only talk not of rewards, for a Cossack takes his pay from the bodies of enemies. I will kill this Master of the Mountain for you. Let me sleep now, for your voice is shrill."

When Toctamish and Berca had left the shop of the armorer, the former to seek a shed outside, and the Persian girl to sleep in her recess, Khlit's snores matched those of the Syrian shopkeeper in volume. For a while only. Then it happened that the snores of the Syrian ceased.

Without disturbing Khlit who was stretched full length on the floor, the Syrian silently pushed past the hangings over the door. Once outside he broke into a trot, his slippers *pad-padding* the dark street. Nor did he soon slacken his pace.

## III

KHLIT and Toctamish did not make the best of bed-fellows. Berca, however, was careful to see that no serious quarrel broke out between the two. In a bark that went from Astrakan, the day after their meeting, to the south shore of the Sea of Khozar, the two warriors of different races occupied a small cupboard which adjoined the cabin of the sheik's daughter.

Khlit had embarked not altogether willingly. When the fumes of *arak* had cleared from his head the next morning, he had half-repented of his bargain. Curiosity to see the other side of the salt sea, which he had known as the Caspian, rather than the pleadings of Berca, finally brought him aboard the bark with his horse from which he refused to be separated.

The girl had bought their passage with the last of her pearls, and some gold of Toctamish's, and had remained in her cabin since, to which Toctamish brought food. The Cossack, after a survey of the small vessel which disclosed his fellow-voyagers as some few Syrian silk-merchants, with the Tatar crew, took possession of a nook in the high poop deck, and kept a keen lookout for the islands and other vessels they passed, and for *Bab-al-abuab*, the lofty gate of gates as the ship made its way southward. Toctamish, who had not set foot on a ship before, was very ill, to Khlit's silent satisfaction.

One day, when the wind was too high for comfort on deck, the Cossack sought Toctamish in the cupboard where the latter lay, ill at ease on some skins.

"Hey, Flat-Face," Khlit greeted him, sitting opposite against the side of the dark recess, "you look as if the devil himself was chewing at your entrails. Can you speak as well as you grunt? I have a word for you. Where is the little Berca?"

"In her cabin, oh, dog without breeding," snarled the Tatar, who was less disposed to speak, even, than usual, "looking at silks of a Syrian robber. This sickness of the sea is a great sickness, for I am not accustomed."

"You will not die." Khlit stroked his saber thoughtfully across his boots. "Toctamish, gully-jackal, and dog of an unbelieving race, you have been a fool. Perhaps a greater one than I. How did it happen that you became the follower of the little Berca? Has she bewitched you with her smooth skin and dark eyes?"

"Nay, that is not so," Toctamish growled. "She has told you her story. It is true that Kiragai Khan, my master, did not know of her coming. Her attendant and slaves ran away and she felt great shame. Yet she did not lose courage. When her shame was the greatest she begged me to take her to Astrakan, saying that I should be head of her army. She did not say her army was beyond the Salt Sea. Then she made me promise to take her to her people. As you know, her tongue is golden."

"Aye," said Khlit. "Then you are even a greater fool than I had thought. Have you heard of this emperor she is taking us to?"

Toctamish rolled his eyes, and shook his head vaguely.

"His name is not known in our countries.

Mongol Tatars say that their great-grandfathers who followed the banners of Hulagu Khan made war on one calling himself the Old Man of the Mountain and slew many thousands with much booty, beside burning the citadel of Alamut, which was his stronghold. They gave me a dagger which came from Alamut. It is a strange shape."

"If the power of the Old Man of the Mountain was broken in the time of Hulagu Khan," said Khlit idly, "how can it exist now? Have you the dagger?"

The Tatar motioned to his belt with a groan, and Khlit drew from it a long blade with heavy handle. The dagger was of tempered steel, curved like a tongue of fire. On it were inscribed some characters which were meaningless to Khlit. He balanced it curiously in his bony hand.

"I have seen the like, Flat-Face," he meditated idly. "It could strike a good blow. Hey, I remember where I have seen others like it. In the shop of the Syrian armorer, at Astrakan. Who brought you to the shop?"

"We came, dog of a Cossack. The Syrian bade us stay, charging nothing for our beds, only for food."

"Does he understand Tatar language?"

"Nay, Berca spoke with him in her own tongue."

"Aye. Did she speak with you of this Old Man of the Mountain?"

"Once. She said that her people had come under the power of the Old Man of the Mountain. Also that her home was near to Alamut." Toctamish hesitated. "One thing more she said."

"Well, God has given you a tongue to speak."

"She said that your curved sword was useless against him who is called the Old Man of the Mountain."

With this the Tatar rolled over in his skins and kept silence. Wearying of questioning him, Khlit rose and went to the door of Berca's cabin. Toctamish, he meditated, was not one who could invent answers to questions out of his own wit. Either he spoke the truth, or he had been carefully taught what to say. Khlit was half-satisfied that the girl's and the Tatar's story was true in all its details, strange as it seemed. Yet he was wise, with the wisdom of years, and certain things troubled him.

It was not customary for a Tatar of rank to follow the leadership of a woman. Also, it was not clear why Berca should have been so eager for the services of Khlit, the Wolf. Again, she had declared that the Old Man of the Mountain was not to be met with, yet, apparently, she sought him.

Pondering these things, Khlit tapped lightly on the door of the girl's cabin. There was no response and he listened. From within he could hear the quiet breathing of a person in sleep.

He had come to speak with Berca, and he was loath to turn back. Pushing open the door he was about to step inside, when he paused.

Full length on the floor lay Berca, on the blue cloak she always wore. Her black curls flowed over a silk pillow on which her head rested. Her eyes were closed and her face so white that Khlit wondered it had ever been pink.

What drew the Cossack's gaze were two objects on the floor beside her. Khlit saw, so close that some of the dark hairs were caught in them, two daggers sticking upright on either side of the girl's head. The daggers were curved, like a tongue of fire.

Khlit's glance, roaming quickly about the cabin, told him that no one else was there. Berca had not carried two weapons of such size. Another had placed them there. As he noticed the silk cushion, he remembered the Syrian silk-merchant who had been with Berca.

With a muttered curse of surprise, Khlit stepped forward, treading lightly in his heavy boots. Leaning over the girl he scanned her closely. Her breathing was quiet and regular, and her clothing undisturbed. Seeing that she was asleep, the Cossack turned his attention to the weapons.

Drawing the latter softly from the wood, he retreated to the door. Closing this, he climbed to the deck and scanned it for the Syrian merchant. Almost within reach he saw the one he sought, in a group of several ragged traders, squatting by the rail of the ship. No one noticed him, their black sheepskin hats bent together in earnest conversation.

With the daggers under his arm, Khlit swaggered over to the group, the men looking up silently at his approach.

"Hey, infidel dogs," he greeted them, "Here is a pair of good daggers I found lying by the steps. Who owns them? Speak!"

His eye traveled swiftly over the brown faces. None of the group showed interest beyond a curl of the lips at his words. If he had expected the owner to claim his property, he was disappointed. The Syrians resumed their talk together.

"So be it," said Khlit loudly. "They are useless to me. Away with them."

Balancing the weapons, he hurled them along the deck. As he did so, he glanced at the traders. Their conversation was uninterrupted. Yet Khlit saw one of the group look hastily after the flying daggers. It was only a flash of white eyeballs in a lean face, but Khlit stared closer at the fellow, who avoided his eye.

Something in the man's face was familiar to the Cossack. Khlit searched his memory and smiled to himself. The man who had watched the fate of the daggers Khlit had seen in Astrakan. The man had changed his style of garments, but Khlit was reasonably sure that he was no other than the Syrian armorer who had offered his shop to Berca and Toctamish.

Fingering his sword, the Cossack hesitated. It was in his mind to ask at the sword's point what the other had been doing in Berca's cabin. Yet, if the fellow admitted he had left the daggers by the girl, and Khlit did not kill him, the Syrian would be free to work other mischief. And Khlit, careless as he was of life, could see no just reason for killing the Syrian. Better to let the man go, he thought, unaware that he was suspected, and watch.

As an afterthought, Khlit went to where the twisted daggers lay on the deck and threw them over the side.

## IV

IN THE YEAR of the lion, there was a drouth around the Sea of Khozar, and the salt fields of its south shore whitened in the sun. Where the caravan route from Samarkand to Bagdad crossed the salt fields, the watering-places were dry, all save a very few.

The sun was reflected in burning waves from the crusted salt, from which a rock cropped out occasionally, and the wind from the sea did not serve to cool the air. In the annals of Abulghazi, it is written that men and camels of the caravans thirsted in this year, the year in which the waters of Shahrud, by the citadel of Alamut, were to be red with blood.

At one of the few watering-places near the shore, Berca's party of three, with a pack-donkey came to a halt, at the same time that a caravan, coming from the east stopped to refresh the animals.

The Persian girl watched the Kurdish camel-drivers lead their beasts to kneel by the well silently. Khlit, beside her, gazed attentively, although with apparent indifference at the mixed throng of white-and-brown-robed traders with their escort of mounted Kurds. Many looked at Berca, who was heavily veiled, but kept their distance at sight of Khlit.

"It is written, *Abulfetah Harb Issa*, Father of Battles," spoke the girl softly, "that a man must be crafty and wise when peril is 'round his road; else is his labor vain, he follows a luck that flees. Truly there is no luck, for Allah has traced our lives in the divining sands, and we follow our paths as water follows its course. Are you as wise as the masters of evil, oh, Cossack?"

The words were mocking, and Khlit laughed.

"Little Sparrow," he said, "I have seen ever so much evil, and there was none that did not fade when a good sword was waved in front of it. Yet never have I followed a woman."

"You will not follow me much further, Cossack. I will leave you at the foothills to go among my people, the hillmen, where I shall be safe. You and Toctamish will go alone the rest of the way. My face is known to the people of Alamut, who suppose that I am dead or a slave. In time they shall see me, but not yet. Meanwhile it is my wish that you and Toctamish seek the citadel of Alamut, which lies a two-days' journey into the interior."

Khlit shaded his eyes with a lean hand and gazed inland. Above the plain of salt levels he could see a nest of barren foothills which surrounded mountains of great size and height.

"Where lies the path to this Alamut—" he had begun, when Berca shook his arm angrily.

"Not so loud, fool of the steppe! Do you think we are still by the Volga? We are already in the territory of the Old Man of the Mountain. Listen, to what I have already told Toctamish. Two days' travel to the south will bring you to the district of Rudbar. You will find yourself near the River Shahrud which flows from the mountains. There will be hillmen about who do not love the Old Man of the Mountain.

"So do not speak his name, until you come to a bend in the Shahrud where the river doubles on itself, so, like a twisted snake. Across the river will be a mountain of rock which will appear to be a dog kneeling, facing you. Remain there until armed men ride up and question you. Then say you are come to join the ranks of Sheik Halen ibn Shaddah, who is the Old Man of the Mountain."

Khlit shook his head and tapped his sword thoughtfully.

"Nay, little Berca," he said reproachfully, "you have told me lies. You said it was your wish to slay one who had slain your father. And because it was a just quarrel and I was hungry for sight of the world below the Salt Sea, I came to aid you. Are you one, oh, Sparrow, to fight alone against a powerful chief? Where are your men that you told Toctamish of. Devil take me, if I'll put my head in the stronghold of any sheik, as you call him."

Berca bent nearer, rising on tiptoe so her breath was warm in his ear.

"My men are hillmen who will not attack until they see an enemy flee. Also, they have seen men who opposed Halen ibn Shaddah set over a fire, with the skin of their feet torn off. The master of Alamut is all powerful here. Are you afraid, whom they call the Wolf?"

"Nay, little Sparrow, how should I be afraid of women's tales and a mysterious name? Tell me your plan, and I will consider it. How can this sheik be reached?"

"Halen ibn Shaddah is safe from the swords of his enemies. Yet there is a way to reach him, in Alamut. The time will come when you and Toctamish will find yourselves at the head of many swords. How can I tell you, who are a fool in our way of fighting, and know not Alamut, what is in my mind? I swear that soon Halen ibn Shaddah will be attacked. Do you believe my word?"

"Wherefore should I?"

Khlit tugged at his mustache moodily. He was accustomed to settle his quarrels alone, and he liked little to move in the dark. Yet the woman spoke as one having authority, and Toctamish believed in her blindly.

"If this Sheik Halen is powerful and crafty——"

"Still, I am a woman, and wronged by a great wrong. I was sent to offer myself unveiled to a man who had not sought me; and at the same time my father was murdered, so that the hillmen, of whom he was sheik, might come under the shadow of Alamut." The girl's voice was low, but the words trembled with passion and the dark eyes that peered at the Cossack over her veil were dry as with fever, and burning. "Halen ibn Shaddah shall pay for his evil; for he is cursed in the sight of Allah. Wicked—wicked beyond telling is Alamut and therefore cursed."

"Chirp shrilly, little Sparrow," laughed Khlit, "while your white throat is still unslit. This Sheik Halen has no love for you, for one of his men on the bark placed two daggers, one on each side of your black head. Devil take me, if I did not think you would never chirp again. It was the Syrian who took you in for so little pay at Astrakan——"

"Fool! Stupid Cossack!" Berca's eyes suddenly swam with laughter, "did you think I was asleep when you tiptoed in like a bear treading nettles. Or that I did not see the dirty Syrian, who thought to catch me asleep? Look among the men of the caravan, and tell me if you see the Syrian?"

Cautiously, Khlit scanned the groups about the well. Among the Kurdish riders and Tatars who were brown with the dust of the desert trail from Samarkand, he recognized a bent figure in a long gray cloak and black *kollah*. As he watched the figure, it bent still further over a box of goods, and lifted some silks to view. It was the Syrian, without doubt. Khlit felt a thrill, as of one who is hunted and hears the cry of the chase. He stepped forward with an oath, when Berca's grasp tightened on his arm.

"That is a *fedavie* of Alamut," she whispered. "I saw the curved daggers, and they are the weapons of the Refik folk of Halen ibn Shaddah. He must have overheard us in his shop at Astrakan, and has followed to slay, as is the law of Alamut. Probably there are more of the *fedavie* among the men of the caravan."

"Then we must deal with the Syrian before he can speak to them," muttered

Khlit, but again Berca tugged him back.

"Did I not say you were a fool among my people, oh, Wolf," she whispered. "Watch. The Syrian shall have his reward. Your folly is very great, yet I need a man who is blunt and brave and knows not my plans. It is written that none knows where his grave is dug, yet the Syrian's grave is here. Watch, and do not move."

Khlit waited. The *fedavie* had stooped over his box. One or two Kurds gathered to look at its contents. Among the group Khlit noticed Toctamish who had come up quietly. The Tatar pushed past the others, heedless of their muttered curses until he stood directly in front of the trader. The Syrian looked up, and, seeing Toctamish, was motionless.

Khlit saw the Kurds stare and draw back as if they sensed trouble. The Syrian, still watching Toctamish, rose with a swift, cat-like movement, his hand hidden in the silks. Toctamish grunted something and spat upon the silks.

"See," whispered Berca softly, "his grave is dug, and the nameless one sees it."

Toctamish thrust his yellow, scarred face near the Syrian's. Around him a crowd pressed, watching with attention. With a cry, the Syrian, who seemed to have found the suspense too much for him, drew a pistol from the silks in which it had been concealed.

Instantly two giant arms were flung 'round him. Toctamish was on him with a speed that baffled him, and the Tatar's huge bulk pressed the Syrian backward to the ground. Writhing impotently, the Syrian saw Toctamish draw a dagger from his girdle. And Khlit grunted as he noted that it was the one he had seen with blade like a curved flame. While he held the smaller man powerless with one arm, Toctamish lifted the dagger and thrust it carefully into his foe's body, into stomach and chest.

Then, rising, he wiped the curved dagger on a handful of the trader's silks. For a moment the arms and legs of the unhappy Syrian stirred on the ground. And Khlit saw a strange thing. For, before life had gone from the body, several men of the caravan, Khirghiz warriors by their dress, pushed through the throng with daggers like that of Toctamish and struck at the Syrian. Not until the body was still did they cease to strike.

Then the Khirghiz men looked around for Toctamish, but the stocky Tatar had disappeared in the throng. Khlit, who had missed nothing of what happened, thought to himself that it was well that the dagger had been in the hand of Toctamish, not of the Syrian. Plainly, he thought, the Khirghiz murderers had been fellows, without knowing, to the Syrian. And he wondered how men of many races came to be banded together, not knowing that he was to wonder soon, and very greatly, at other things.

## V

BERCA had disappeared; and when Khlit strode through the crowd of the caravan seeking her, his horse at his elbow, he met Toctamish. The Tatar was mounted and leading the pack-mule.

"Mount," he said gruffly, "and follow."

"And what of the girl!" queried Khlit, who was unwilling to take orders from Toctamish.

"She has told us to go on, as you know, *caphar*," snarled the Tatar, who disliked to talk. "Later, she will send word to us. Come."

"We are both fools. You, to be the slave of a painted girl, and I to seek for an empire which is not to be found, to slay a man who is hidden."

Khlit's words were silenced by a sudden uproar in the caravan. Men sprang to their feet and hauled at the camels who had kneeled in weariness. Traders who had been eating gave shouts of lamentation. Laden slaves ran together in confusion.

Toctamish stared at the uproar, until Khlit touched his shoulder.

"Look!" he said.

From the south, over the salt desert a cloud of dust was threading in and out among the rocks. It was advancing swiftly toward them, and the Cossack could see that it was made by mounted men riding very fast. He made out turbans and spear-points in the dust. The horsemen were headed directly toward the caravan.

"Robbers," said Toctamish briefly; "there will be a fight."

"A poor one, it seems," growled Khlit. "The Kurds are leaving us as fast as their horses can take them and your countrymen like the looks of things little—they have not drawn sword or bow."

In truth, the Tatars who were acting as

guard, sat their horses stolidly, while the dismayed traders added to the confusion by rushing about frantically, trying to assemble their goods. Khlit turned his attention, in disgust to the oncoming horsemen, and counted a bare two score. In numbers, the caravan was three times as strong; yet no attempt at defense was made.

Instead the traders were anxiously spreading out their bales of goods, so that all were displayed. Camels and donkeys were stripped and their burden placed on the ground. In the meantime the horsemen who had come up were trampling recklessly through the confusion.

A fat Greek merchant held out an armful of rugs to one of the riders who stared at it insolently and pointed to the heavy packs behind the merchant. Other riders jerked out the contents of these packs, and ranged them in nine piles.

Khlit, watching them, saw that they were men of varied race. He guessed at Persian, Kurd, Circassian, Turk and others with whom he was not familiar—dark-skinned, and heavily-cloaked who sat their horses as a swallow rides the wind. Also, the Khirghiz men of the caravan had joined the newcomers.

The first rider flung some words at the Greek who was cowering on the ground and Khlit thought he caught the phrase "Alamut." Then the horsemen picked up three of the nine piles of goods, and flung them over pack-horses. Other riders who had been similarly occupied joined them. All the while the Tatar guardians of the caravan watched without interest, as men who had seen the like before.

It was not until the horsemen were well away over the salt plain that Khlit recovered from his astonishment at the sight of few robbing many.

"Better the mountain-folk than these," he growled, spitting in the direction of the merchants who were putting their goods away amid lamentations.

So it came to pass that a Cossack rode into the foothills of Rudbar where, in the words of the historian Abulghazi, none set foot who held Allah or Christ for their true God, and with him rode a Tatar who, under other circumstances would gladly have slain him.

They rode in silence, as rapidly as the pack animal could move, and by nightfall had gained the edge of the salt deposits that made that part of Persia like a frozen lake.

Each made camp after his fashion. And two fires were lighted instead of one. Khlit produced some barley cakes and wine and made a good meal. Toctamish took some raw meat from under his saddle where he had placed it for seasoning and washed it down with his favorite *arak*. Both kindled pipes and sat in silence in the darkness.

Toctamish's pipe went out first, and Khlit knew that the Tatar had swallowed the smoke until with the burning *arak* he had lost consciousness. The Cossack was soon asleep.

His sleep was unbroken, except that, near dawn, he thought he heard the trampling of many horses' feet, which sounded until the rays of the sun, slipping into his eyes, awoke him. He made out at some distance the track of a cavalcade in the dust, and considered that it might have been a caravan. Yet it was out of the path of caravans. Moreover, he was reasonably sure the track had not been there the night before. Toctamish, when wakened, yawned in bad spirits and told Khlit he was an old woman, of great fear and unmentionable descent.

When they resumed their path, it led upward through the foothills of Rudbar. A few date trees and some thorn bushes lined the way, but for the most part there was little foliage and many rocks. The grass, however, was good, and this was, perhaps, the reason why groups of horses were met with under the care of single, mounted horsemen who watched Khlit and his companion with curiosity.

They rode apart and silently, as before. Khlit's thoughts dwelt on Berca's last words. The girl had spoken as one having authority. She was no ordinary sheik's daughter, living out of sight of men, he thought. She was daring, and he wondered if she came from one of the hill-tribes where the women ride with men.

Berca had told him they were in the land of Halen ibn Shaddah, in the territory of the Refik folk, yet Khlit saw no signs of a town or city. He did see the tracks of multitudes of horses in the mountains where caravans were unknown. And the horses themselves puzzled him. For he could see nothing of their riders.

Toctamish, apparently, wasted no thought on his surroundings. He rode warily, but kept his thoughts to himself and pressed onward rapidly. Thus it was that the two came to a wide, shallow river, and followed the bank along a valley that seemed to sink further into the hills as they advanced.

Until sunset they rode, making detours to avoid waterfalls and fording the river where it curved—for it was very shallow—and then Khlit who was in the lead came to a halt as they rounded a bend.

"By the bones of Satan," he swore, "here is the place Berca told us of. Devil take me, if it does not look like a dog with his front paws in the river."

Like an arched bow the river curved, with the two riders standing at the end of the bow looking inward. Across from them rose a high point of rock, serried and overgrown with bushes, several hundred feet. No trees were on the summit of the rock. Instead, Khlit could make out masses of stones tumbling together and overgrown. A few pillars stood up through the débris.

Around the summit ran the semblance of a wall. So great was the waste of stone that it was hard to see any semblance of order in it, but Khlit judged that a citadel as big as a good-sized town had once crowned the dog-promontory. The rock jutted out to make the massive head of the beast, and ridges suggested paws.

"Here is no Alamut, Toctamish," growled Khlit in disgust. "Truly, we are fools—the little sparrow, Berca, has made game of us."

"Wait, *caphar*," retorted Toctamish, dismounting. "She said we would find the dog sitting in the river, thus, and we have found it. We will wait here and see what happens."

"Well, we will wait," laughed Khlit, "and see if the dog will give birth to a tribe."

## VI

LITTLE Khlit suspected how true his chance word was to be. The sun had dropped behind the furthest mountain summit, and the night cold of the high elevation had wrapped around the two watchers when they saw a sight that made their blood stir.

The Cossack had stretched on the ground a little distance from Toctamish, who had subsided into snores. He watched the last light melt from the ruins on the summit of the cliff, and as he watched he thought he heard echoes from across the river, as from far off. Straining his ears, he could catch bursts of music and shouting. Remembering his experience with the horses the previous night, he wondered if the mountains were playing tricks with his ears.

The sounds would come in bursts as though a gate had been opened to let them out, followed by silence. Khlit was not at home in the hills, and he did not recognize the peculiar resonance of echoes. What he thought he heard were songs and shouts repeated from mouth to mouth, as by giants, in the heart of the rock opposite him.

Lighting his pipe and cursing himself for a dreaming fool, Khlit sat up and scanned the darkness over the river. As if to mock him, the burst of shouting became clearer. And then the skin moved along Khlit's back of its own accord and his jaw dropped. He shook his head angrily, to make sure he was still awake.

Out of the rock across the river a multitude of lights were flickering. The lights came toward him rapidly, and the shouting grew. There were torches, moving out on the river, and by their glare he could see a mass of moving men armed with spears and bows. Splashing through the water, they were fording the shallow river.

Khlit could see that they were men of varied race, turbaned and cloaked, armed for the most part with bow and arrows, much like those who had robbed the caravan. As the throng came nearer, he shook Toctamish and stood up.

"Loosen your sword, Father of Swine," he grunted, "here are men who are not triflers."

Several of the leaders, who had caught sight of the two, closed around them. The torchlight was thrown in their faces, and for a moment the shouting of the band was silenced as they surveyed Khlit and his companion. One, very lean and dark of face, dressed in a white coat bossed with gold, and wearing a tufted turban of the same colors, spoke in a tongue Khlit did not understand.

"Hey, brothers," swore Khlit genially,

laughing, for the presence of danger pleased him, "have you any who speak like Christians? Khlit, called the Wolf, would speak with you."

After some delay, a dirty tribesman was thrust beside the man of white and gold.

"Wherefore are you here?" the tribesman, who seemed to be a Kurd, asked in broken Russian, "and what is your purpose? Be brief, for the *Dais* are impatient to march. Are you a Christian, Cossack?"

"Say that you are not," whispered Toctamish, who had caught what was said, "for none with a god can go into the mountain."

"A dog will give up his faith," snarled Khlit, "but a Cossack does not deny God and the Orthodox Church. Aye," he responded to the Kurd, "I am a Christian. I have come to Rudbar, or to Alamut, whatever you call the place, to seek him who is called the Old Man of the Mountain. What is your name and faith?"

A peculiar look of fear crossed the face of the Kurd.

"Seek you the Master of the Mountain, Sheik Halen ibn Shaddah, Cossack? My name is Iba Kabash, and I was once a Christian. What is your mission with the Lord of Alamut?"

"Tell the unbeliever we have come to join the Refik, where there is no law—" began Toctamish, but Khlit motioned him to silence.

"Take us to Sheik Halen ibn Shaddah, and we will tell him our mission, Iba Kabash," he retorted. "We are not men to parley with slaves."

The man of white and gold had grown impatient, and spoke a few angry words to Iba Kabash, who cringed. Several of the bowmen ranged themselves beside them, and the throng pushed past, leaving a single torch with the Kurd, who motioned to Khlit to follow him. Leaving their horses with an attendant, Khlit and Toctamish made their way after Iba Kabash to the river. The current was not overswift, and the water came barely to their knees.

"It is the wish of the *Dai*, Cossack, that you shall enter Alamut. What is your mission? Tell me and I shall be a true friend. I swear it. Surely you have a strong reason for your coming," the Kurd's greasy head was thrust close to the Cossack's. "Let me hear but a word."

"If the *Dai* named you guide, Iba Kabash, of the mangy beard, lead us, and talk not."

In his heart Khlit distrusted the offered friendship of the Kurd. And he watched closely where they went, across the Shahrud, into the shadows of the further bank. And he saw how it was the *Dai's* followers had come from the mountain.

Concealed by the shadows, were grottoes, where the water had eaten into the rock, grottoes which ran deep into the mountain. The torch reflected from the dark surface of the water, as they splashed forward, with the river becoming shallower. Presently they stood on dry rock. Here they were in a cave, of which Khlit could not see the top.

Iba Kabash pulled impatiently at his arm and they went forward, and up. Khlit saw that now they were on rock which was the handiwork of man. They were ascending broad steps, each one a pace in width, and so broad that the torch barely showed rows of stone pillars on either side.

Khlit had counted fifty steps when Iba Kabash came to a halt, grinning. Lifting the torch overhead, he pointed to a square stone, set in the rocky roof of the stairs. On this rock were lines of writing strange to Khlit, and blackened with age and the dampness of the place.

"The gateway of Alamut, oh, Cossack," laughed the Kurd. "And the writing of one who was as great as Mohammed, prophet of Allah. And the message:

"With the help of God
The ruler of the world
Loosened the bands of the law,
Blessed be his name."

Khlit was silent. He had not expected to find himself in a cave in the heart of a mountain. The darkness and damp, rising from the river, chilled him. Glancing ahead, he saw a rocky passage, wide and lofty. The passage had been made by the river, perhaps in a former age, when it had risen to that level. But the hands of men had widened it and smoothed the walls. Toctamish, he saw, was scrutinizing his surroundings, his slant eyes staring from a lined, yellow face.

"Come," said Iba Kabash, who seemed to enjoy the silence of his visitors, "this was not the gateway of Alamut always, in the days of the first Master of the Mountain. And Alamut has changed. It has sunk into the mountain. Men say the old Alamut was destroyed."

"Aye," said Toctamish suddenly, "by Hulagu Khan."

The Kurd stared at him curiously.

"Come," he muttered, and led the way up the winding rock passage.

Khlit followed closely. Other passages joined the one they were in. At times, sounds came down these passages—distant rumblings, and strains of music. Occasionally a figure armed with a spear stepped from them and scanned the group. Always a wind whipped around them, cold, in spite of the heat of the air outside.

After a time, Khlit saw that they were no longer in the passage. The torch did not reveal walls, and the footing was regular, of stone slabs. They had entered a chamber of some kind. Other torches made their appearance suddenly. The sound of voices came to them clearly.

They approached a fire around which lay several armed men. Khlit guessed from their dress that they were Khirghiz men; furthermore, that they appeared drunk. Only one or two looked up, without interest. Iba Kabash led them past many fires and men until they came to narrow stone stairs which led away from the rock chambers. Here, a giant Turk spoke with Iba Kabash before letting them pass.

"We will speak with Rashideddin," whispered the Kurd, "the astrologer of Halen ibn Shaddah. Tell me now your mission? I can help you."

Toctamish would have spoken, fingering a money pouch at his belt on which the Kurd's gaze fastened greedily, but Khlit shook his head. With a sneer, their guide stepped on the stairway. Khlit climbed after him, and noted that the stairs wound up still further. He guessed that they had ascended several hundred feet since leaving the bed of the river.

Then, leaving the stair, he found himself in a round chamber, hung with tapestries and rugs of great beauty. Several oil lamps, suspended from the ceiling lighted the place. A warm breath of air caused him to look up. A circular opening formed the center of the ceiling, and through this he could see the stars and the velvet vault of the sky.

Two of the dark-faced men, strange to Khlit, like the *Dai* of white and gold, stood by the wall, wearing mail and resting on spears. A small ebony table was loaded with parchments and instruments which the Cossack had never seen before. In the center of the floor was a chess-board, and sitting on either side of the chessboard were two men.

One, Khlit recognized by his tufted turban and brilliant white coat, to be of the kind Iba Kabash had called *Dai*. The other wore a close-fitting skullcap and a gray cloak without a sash. He looked at Khlit and the latter saw a lean face, gray, almost as the cloak, with close-set black eyes, and a loose-lipped mouth, very pale.

"Oh, Rashideddin," said Iba Kabash, "here are the two who have just come, of whom I have sent word. The Cossack is a Christian and insolent. The other is altogether a fool."

## VII

RASHIDEDDIN is mentioned in the annals of Abulghazi as a savant of the *khalifate* of Bagdad and Damascus. He was a Persian, trained in the arts of astrology and divination, who could recite from memory the works of Jelaleddin Rumi. He was acquainted with many languages including Russian and Tatar. It is believed that he possessed all the works of the Alamut library which escaped the destructive hands of Hulagu Khan.

Inscrutable, and gifted, Rashideddin made a mockery of the Koran. He kept his truly great wisdom to himself, except for certain poems which he sent to princes of Persia and Arabia, who gained no happiness thereby. So it was not strange that Rashideddin, the savant of dark knowledge came to a place of evil, of strange and very potent evil. So say the annals of Abulghazi.

Rashideddin did not look at his visitors. He lifted a piece with care and replaced it on the chessboard. The *Dai*, who Khlit observed, was drunk, as were the men around the fires, yet very pale, did likewise. Khlit, who had small liking for chess, watched the players rather than the board. Especially did he watch Rashideddin. The pale-lipped astrologer sat with half-closed eyes, intent and motionless. The gray cloak seemed not to move with his breathing. When he spoke, his deep and musical voice startled them.

"Have you a god, Cossack? Is your faith firm in the Christian cross you wear around your neck?"

Startled, Khlit moved his hand to his throat, where hung a small, gold cross. Iba Kabash was making hasty signs to him which he did not see.

"Aye, Rashideddin," said he gravely, "the *batko* has told me about the cross which I carry, and it is a talisman against evil. Hey, it has been good, that cross, because I have killed many and am still living."

"Evil?" said Rashideddin, and moved a jeweled chessman to another square. "The earth is evil. If a saint handles earth it becomes gold. Yet who has seen a saint? Do you seek to bring your cross into Alamut?"

"Not so, Rashideddin," vouchsafed Khlit, crossing his arms. "I bring a sword to Alamut, to Halen ibn Shaddah. The cross is my own. If you can see it through my *svitza* then you must have good eyes. I am outcast from my people of the Ukraine, and men told me there was work for swords with Halen ibn Shaddah."

"And you call yourself Khlit, the Wolf?" queried the astrologer. "How did you find the gate of Alamut?"

Khlit was bewildered at the astrologer's knowledge of his name until he remembered that he had told it to Iba Kabash.

"Aye. There was a caravan by the Sea of Khozar that a band from Alamut robbed. We," Khlit bethought him swiftly, "followed the riders to the mountains and waited by the gate."

Rashideddin considered the chessboard silently.

"You came over the Sea of Khozar," he murmured, "from Astrakan? That must have been the way. There is another way around by land that the caravans take. They are our prey. What the Kallmark Tatars leave the merchants, we share. Did you see a Syrian armorer in Astrakan?"

"Aye, a bearded fellow. We stayed at his house. He told us we might find use for our swords with Halen ibn Shaddah."

With a delicate movement, Rashideddin lifted one of his opponent's pieces from the board.

"And your companion?" he said.

"A Tatar horseman who has quarreled with his kin," spoke up Toctamish bluntly. "I'm tired of laws, noble sir, and I——"

"Laws are too complex, Tatar. If a man has an enemy, slay him. If a man desires a certain thing, take it. Are not these the only laws? In Alamut you are free from all laws except those of the *Refik*. You have an image of Natagai in your girdle, Tatar." Rashideddin had not looked at Toctamish since the first moment. "Take it and throw it on the floor."

Toctamish hesitated. He glanced irresolutely at Khlit; then drew out a small cloth figure, painted like a doll and tossed it on the stones. The Cossack saw that it was ragged and worn by much use. He had not suspected that his companion cherished any holy image.

"Spit on it," directed Rashideddin softly.

With a muttered curse Toctamish did so. His lined face was damp with perspiration, and Khlit saw that his hands were trembling. The shifting eyes of Iba Kabash gleamed mockingly.

"The armorer at Astrakan must have told you that Alamut is no place for one who has a god," went on Rashideddin. "There is one here who is greater than Mohammed. We are his servants. Yet our *akd* says that none go forth who are not of us. Think, Khlit, and decide. Meanwhile——"

The astrologer spoke to Iba Kabash in another tongue and the Kurd went to a corner of the room where a pile of rugs and cloths lay. Selecting a long, white cloth, he laid it in front of Khlit. This done, he stepped back, licking his thick lips softly.

"Tell the Cossack what you have done, Iba Kabash," said Rashideddin.

"This cloth," whispered the Kurd, "is a shroud, Khlit. The astrologer may call his men and lay you in it dead, unless you say you have no god. Do as your friend—remember I have given you good advice. You are in a place where your life is worth no more than a dagger-thrust. Your sword will be useless."

With a beating heart, Khlit glanced around the chamber. The two mailed Tatars were watching him silently. He thought he could see the dim forms of other men in recesses in the wall. And for all Rashideddin's unconcern, he felt that the astrologer was alive to every move he made. He felt as he had once when the Krim Tatars had bound his limbs, leaving him powerless.

"Aye," he said.

Without looking at Rashideddin, he moved to the pile of cloths and selected another shroud. This he brought back and placed beside the other. Iba Kabash watched him with staring eyes. The *Dai* frowned and fingered a dagger at his girdle. Khlit drew his curved sword and stood over the white cloths.

"Tell Rashideddin, Iba Kabash," he said, "what this other shroud is for."

"What—how do you mean?" muttered the Kurd.

"It is for the man who first tries to kill me, dog," snarled Khlit.

The astrologer bent over the chessboard impassively. Apparently he was blind to what passed in the room and to the words of Iba Kabash. The others watched him, and there was silence. Until Rashideddin raised his head suddenly and compressed his pale lips.

"You fool," he smiled, "blunderer of the steppes! This is not Russia. Here there is one law, and punishment; murder! See!"

He pointed a white hand at one of the mailed Tatars. The man started forward, and drew back shivering.

"Kill thyself, fellow," said Rashideddin quietly.

The Tatar stared at him and cast a helpless glance around the room. Khlit saw his right hand go to his girdle and tremble convulsively.

"*Fedavie!*" the astrologer's voice was gentle, "show the Russian our law. By the oath of the *Refik*, kill thyself!"

With a grunt of sheer terror the man dropped his spear. His right hand rose from the girdle, gripping a dagger curved like a flame. Rose, and sank into his throat. With the hilt of the dagger wedged under his chin, the Tatar sagged to the floor, quivered and was still. One bloodstained hand had fallen among the chessmen.

There was silence in the room for a moment, broken by Toctamish. The Tatar stepped to Khlit's side.

"You and I are brothers, Cossack," he growled, "and your danger is my danger."

Rashideddin, who had given a sigh of pleasure at the death of the attendant, studied the disordered chessmen impassively. The *Dai* sprang to his feet with an oath. For several heart-beats no one moved. Iba Kabash stared in fascination at a red pool which had formed under the dead Tatar's head.

## VIII

THE astrologer, apparently giving up as hopeless the attempt to replace the chessmen, stood up. And Khlit, who was watching, wondered at his figure. The man was bent so that his back was in the form of a bow. His head stuck forward, pale as a fish's belly, topped by the red skullcap. His gray cloak came to the ground. Yet when he moved, it was with a soft quickness.

"You see," he said, as if nothing had happened, "the oath of Alamut—obedience, and——"

He stirred the shroud contemptuously with his foot. Then, as if arriving at a decision, he turned to Iba Kabash.

"Take these clowns to the banquet-place, and give them food. See that they are not harmed."

With that he motioned to the *Dai* and retreated through one of the recesses. Toctamish wiped his brow on which the perspiration had gathered and touched the dead man with his foot.

"The good Rashideddin will not kill you," chanted the Kurd eagerly. "It must be a miracle, for you are both fools. You have me to thank for your safety. I have given good advice, have I not?"

Toctamish eyed him dubiously. He did not feel oversure of safety. Khlit, however, whispered to him. Rashideddin was not the man to play with them if he desired their death. It might be that the astrologer's words were in good faith—Khlit learned later that the latter never troubled to lie—and if so they would gain nothing and lose much by staying where they were.

So it happened that both warriors sheathed their swords with apparent good grace and followed Iba Kabash who led them through empty rooms until they came out on a balcony overlooking the banquet-place of Alamut. And Khlit was little prepared for what he saw now.

The warm wind touched their faces again. Iba Kabash pointed up. In the center of the lofty ceiling of the place a square opening let in the starlight. A crescent moon added to the light which threw a silver sheen over the great floor of the hall. Toctamish grunted in surprise.

At first it seemed as if they were looking on the camp of an army from a hillside.

Dozens of fires smoldered on the floor below them, and a hundred oil lamps sprinkled the intervening space. About the lamps men were lying, around small tables on which fruit, wine and dishes massed. A buzz of voices echoed down the hall, and Khlit was reminded of bees stirring about the surface of a hive.

The sound of eating and drinking drowned the noise of voices. Along the stone balcony where they stood other tables were placed with lamps. Numerous dark figures carried food and drink to these and carried away the refuse left at other tables.

"Slaves," said the Kurd, "captives of the *Refik*. Let us find a table and eat. It is a lucky night that I met you, for I shall go into the paradise of Alamut."

Khlit paid little attention to the last phrase. Later, he was to remember it. Being very hungry he sat down with Toctamish at a convenient table and took some of the bread and roasted meat which he found there. Toctamish was less restrained, and gulped down everything with zest.

As he ate Khlit considered his companions, and the banquet-place. All of them, he noticed, seemed drowsy, as if drunk, or very gay. In the lamplight their faces showed white. They lay in heaps about the tables, sometimes one on the other.

To the Cossack drunkenness was no sin, yet there was something about the white faces and limp figures of the men that stirred his blood. And the smell of the place was unpleasant, a damp, musky odor seemed to rise from the hall under them, as of beasts. Piles of fruit lay rotting about the floor.

"It is time," chattered the Kurd, who was sipping at a goblet of wine, "Halen ibn Shaddah showed himself. He comes to the banquet-place every night, and we drink to him. Drink, Khlit—are not Cossacks born with a grape in their mouths? You are lucky to be alive, for Rashideddin is a viper without mercy."

"Who is this Rashideddin?" asked Khlit, setting down the wine, for it was not to his liking.

"Oh, he is the wise man of the arch-prophet—the master of Alamut. He knows more magic than all the Greeks and dervishes put together. He reads the stars, and tells our master when it is time to send out expeditions. They say he has servants in every city of the world. But I think he learns everything from the magic sands." Iba Kabash's tongue was outstripping his wit. "There is nothing that goes on in Persia and Tartary that he does not see. How did he know you wore a cross?"

"He saw the chain at my neck, fool," retorted Khlit.

He began to feel strangely elated. He had had only a little wine, but his head was whirling and he had a curious languor in his limbs. The trouble extended to his eyes, for as he looked at the banquet-place, it seemed to have grown wider and lighter. He could see that Toctamish was half-unconscious.

Thus it was that Khlit, the Wolf, in the banquet-place of Alamut came under the influence of the strange evil that gripped the place. And came to know of the great wickedness, which set Alamut apart from the world, as with a curse.

Khlit, turning the situation over in his mind, saw that it was best to play the part he had taken on himself. He doubted if it were possible to escape past the guards by the river stairway, even if he could free himself from the guardianship of Iba Kabash. Rashideddin, he felt, had not left his visitors unwatched. Also, he was curious to see further of the strange world of Alamut, which was a riddle of which he had not found the key. He had seen a Tatar kill himself at a word from the astrologer, and Iba Kabash who was a man without honor, speak with awe of the master of Alamut. Who was Halen ibn Shaddah? And what was his power over the men of Alamut?

As it happened, it was not long before Khlit saw the man he was seeking, and whom he was sworn to kill. There came a pause in the murmur of talk and Iba Kabash clutched his shoulder.

"Look!" he whispered. "Here is Sheik Halen ibn Shaddah, who will choose those to go into paradise tonight. You are newcomers in Alamut and he may choose you, whereon I shall follow behind without being seen. Pray that his eye may fall on us, for few go to paradise."

Across the banquet-place, on the stone balcony, Khlit saw a group of torches. The bearers were *Dais*. In the center of the torches stood a tall man, dressed as the *Dais* except that he wore no turban, a cloak covering his head, drawn down so that nothing could be seen of his face. The sheik's shoulders were very broad and the hands that rested on his girdle were heavy.

As Khlit watched, Halen ibn Shaddah moved along the balcony among the eaters. On the banquet floor a murmur grew into a shout—

"Blessed be he that has unmade all laws; who is master of the *akd;* chief of chief, prophet of prophets, sheik of sheiks; who holds the keys of the gate of paradise."

Iba Kabash shouted as if in ecstacy, rising on his knees and beating his palms together, as the group of the sheik came nearer them. Once or twice Khlit saw Halen ibn Shaddah beckon to a man who rose hastily and followed the *Dais*. Iba Kabash, he thought, was drunk, yet not in a fashion known to Cossacks. Khlit himself felt drowsy, although clear in mind. He saw that the noise had wakened Toctamish who was swaying on his haunches and muttering.

Halen ibn Shaddah stood over them, and Khlit thought that one of the *Dais* whispered to him. The Cossack had fastened his gaze greedily on the cloaked face, for he wished to see the face of the master of Alamut. He could make out only a round, dark countenance, and eyes that showed much white. Vaguely he remembered that he had seen others who had faces like that, but he could not think who they were. The sight of Halen ibn Shaddah affected him like the foul smell of the banquet-place and the rat-eyes of Iba Kabash. Halen ibn Shaddah beckoned to him and Toctamish.

Khlit supported his companion to his feet, but found that the wine had taken away all his own strength. Hands, belonging, he suspected to slaves, helped him after the white figures of the *Dais*. They passed from the banquet-place through passages that he could see only dimly. The torchlight vanished, and there came a silence, which was broken by music, very sweet. Khlit's head was swimming strangely, and he felt himself moving forward through darkness. Darkness in which the music echoed, being repeated softly as he had heard the voices repeated when they first came into the passages of Alamut.

## IX

IF IT was a dream, Khlit asked himself, why should he be able to taste the red wine that trinkled down his throat? Yet if it were not a dream, why should a torrent of the red wine issue from a rock? And sunlight burn on the red current, when Khlit was in the passages of Alamut, under the ground?

Truly, it must be a dream, he thought. It seemed that he was lying on his side near the flowing wine, with the sun warm on his face. Whenever he wanted to drink, he did not need to sit up, for he raised his hand and a girl with flowers around her head and breast came, and filled some vessel which she held out to him. Khlit was very thirsty and the wine was good.

The girl, he felt, sat by him, and her finger-nails and the soles of her bare feet were red. He had never seen such a maiden, for her hair also was red, and the sun glinted through it as she drew it across his face. Her hair must be perfumed, he thought, like the harlots of Samarkand, for it smelled very good.

The music came to his ears from time to time, and he snorted, for Khlit was no lover of soft sounds. Neither did he fully relish the wine, which was oversweet. He was well content to be in the sun, and too drowsy to wonder how it happened.

The dream, if it was that, changed, and Khlit was in a boat lying on some rugs. The boat was drifting along a canal. From time to time it would pass under a porcelain *kiosk*, tasselled and inlaid with ivory. From these *kiosks* girls laughed down at him and threw flowers. One of the tinted faces was like Berca's, and Khlit thought then it was surely a dream.

One other thing he remembered. It was in a grove of date trees where young boys ran, shouting, and pelted each other with fruit. In spite of the warmth and pleasantness, Khlit felt very tired. He was in the shade of one of the date trees with his sword across his knees. The music was very faint here, for which he was glad. He seemed very wakeful. The air was clear, and looking up he could see the sky, between jagged walls of stone. He had seen other walls of stone like these. That was when he and Toctamish had stood at the Shahrud looking up at the dog rock that was Alamut.

Even in the dream, Khlit felt ill. He saw the damsel of the red hair and flowers and beckoned to her, for he was thirsty. She ran away, probably at the sight of his sword. Khlit felt angry, for she had given him drink for what seemed many years.

Then he saw the gray-cloaked figure of Rashideddin, the astrologer of Alamut, beside him, and the white face stared at him until Khlit fidgeted. He heard Rashideddin speak, very faintly.

"Where art thou?"

Khlit was too tired to answer at first.

"I know not," he said finally.

"Thou art in paradise, and by favor of Halen ibn Shaddah. Do not forget."

Truly, Khlit had not forgotten. There were other things he remembered. Vistas of blue pools where dark-skinned men bathed, and date groves where bright-colored birds walked, dragging their tails on the ground. He saw girls pass, hand in hand, singing. And the music did not cease.

If it had been a dream, Khlit said to himself, how could the taste of the strange wine stick to his palate? Or the warmth of the sun be still burning on his skin? Nay, surely it must have been a dream. And the waking was disagreeable.

The place where he found himself on waking was dark, wet and smelled strongly of wine dregs. Khlit rose to his knees cautiously and felt about him with his hand. He could feel the outline of something round and moist on all sides except overhead. Also he came upon the body of a man lying by him, which he identified by its fur tunic and peaked helmet as Toctamish. The Tatar was snoring heavily.

"Wake, Flat-Face and son of an unclean animal," he growled, shaking him. "We are no longer in paradise. Devil take me, if it ain't a wine cask."

Toctamish roused at length and sat up reluctantly.

"Is it you, *caphar?*" he asked, stretching himself. "Many times have I been drunk as an ox, but never such as this. May the devil bite me, if there was ever such wine! Let us find some more."

"Then you have been dreaming, also," meditated Khlit. "Did you imagine that you saw Berca?"

"Berca? Nay, but she said that she would visit us here. That was no dream, *caphar*, for there was sunlight, and much feasting. Did Rashideddin tell you it was paradise? I met other Tatars there. They told me what it was."

"Were they also men who dishonored their god at Rashideddin's bidding? What said they concerning this paradise of yours?"

Toctamish snarled in anger, at the memory of the scene by the chessboard.

"You are one without brains, Cossack, and it is well that we are here alive. My companions said this: that all who came to Alamut were admitted to the paradise by Halen ibn Shaddah, if they were worthy. Then, if they were killed in the ranks of the *Refik* their souls returned to the paradise. That was a lie, for how can there be a soul in a man?"

Khlit said nothing. But he thought that he had found the key to the riddle. Halen ibn Shaddah's power lay in the lusts of his men. They looked on him, even so shrewd a man as Iba Kabash, as one who held the secret of paradise. And, although he did not know it, Khlit's thought had come near to the evil of Alamut, which was a plague spot on the face of the world.

## X

IN THE next few days the two warriors, bound together by mutual interest, although cordially hating each other, made frequent explorations of the chambers of Alamut. In the daytime sunlight filtered in at the banquet-place, the round chamber of Rashideddin and other places, but at night the only light was from lamps or torches. The chambers were large enough to hold a hundred men in each and there were many. Khlit, who had keen eyes, learned several things, including the place of the *Refik* treasure.

First, a certain area was guarded against intrusion by picked Tatars and Arabs. Into the guarded chambers he had seen *Dais* and other higher dignitaries called *Dailkebirs* go, and he guessed they were occupied by Halen ibn Shaddah and his court, where was kept the gold that flowed into Alamut as tribute money.

Also, there was no exit from the chambers of Alamut save by way of the stairway and the river, which was guarded. Frequently armed bands went in and out, also messengers of many races, but all were closely watched. Moreover, few except old residents of the place, like Iba Kabash, the Kurd, knew the way to the river stairway.

The slaves, he learned, brought food not from the river stairway, but another source. Also wood for the fires. The warriors of Alamut, *fedavie*, as they were called, lived as they chose, under the eyes of the *Dais*, ornamenting their quarters with spoil taken in raids or from caravans. Each man was richly decked in whatever suited his fancy, of silks or jewels. The *Dais* who commanded them took interest in them only when it was time to take an expedition out of Alamut.

So much Khlit saw, and more he learned from the talkative Iba Kabash, who had won some gold at dice from Toctamish, and was inclined to be friendly. The slaves, he said, brought the food from the side of Alamut away from the river, where they drew it up in baskets to the summit of a wall that barred all egress from the citadel.

Iba Kabash had not been beyond the walls of Alamut since his entry. Yet he had heard much of the empire of the *Refik* that stretched its power from Semarkand to Aleppo and from Astrakan to Basra. The murderers of the *Refik* were feared so greatly, he explained, that tribute was paid by the cities to Alamut. Questioned by Khlit, he admitted that in numbers any of the califates were superior to Alamut. The power of Halen ibn Shaddah lay in the daggers of his men. No enemy escaped assassination once he was marked. And many were marked.

"Then there is no way to leave save by the river stair?" asked Khlit, who had listened attentively.

Iba Kabash stared and shook his head.

"Where is the fool who would escape, Khlit?" he responded. "Thrice lucky are we who are here. There was a calif who marched against us with horsemen from Irak. We rained down stones and baked clay on his men; then sallied forth, and the Shadrud was red with blood."

"Aye," said Toctamish sullenly. "There are no better fighters than those of Irak. Remember Hulaga Khan and his horsemen."

"Nay, I knew them not."

Iba Kabash glanced at the Tatar curiously, and Khlit laughed to distract his mind, for he did not trust the Kurd.

"There was another who opposed us," continued Iba Kabash. "That was a sheik of the hillmen in the mountains around Alamut. Him we killed by tearing out his belly and bowels. He had a daughter, who was a spit-fire. Rashideddin dealt with her."

"How?" asked Khlit carelessly, recognizing the description as Berca.

"Cleverly, very cleverly," chuckled the Kurd, rubbing his hands together. "He had Halen ibn Shaddah order her off to marry some Tatar chief who knew her not. It was when she had gone that we slew the old chief slowly, and scattered his tribe."

"Truly a shrewd trick." Khlit gave Toctamish a warning blow in the ribs that made the stocky warrior grunt. "How fared the chief's daughter at the hands of the Tatar? Your knowledge is greater than that of others, Iba Kabash. Can you tell me that?"

"Nay, that is a hard one," laughed the Kurd. "I have heard, from a slave that the chief's daughter, Berca, was seen in Astrakan. Also that she was taken as a slave by some caravan not far from here. I know not."

"Was the one who told you a slave in Alamut?" demanded Toctamish, who was becoming restive.

"Where else, offspring of a donkey?" muttered Iba Kabash. "I suppose you will also ask how he came to hear of the girl."

"Nay," interrupted Khlit. "Toctamish wondered at the power of Alamut. He is a clown. You and I, Iba Kabash, are men of wisdom."

So it happened that Khlit was not astonished when, as he came from the floor of the banquet-place, one night, his head hazy with the fumes of the strange wine, a girl slave leaned close to him and whispered briefly.

"By the far corner of the balcony," she repeated, "in an hour."

He looked thoughtfully at an object the slave had thrust into his hand. It was the sapphire which Berca had once offered him.

He did not tell Toctamish of the message. And he was at some pains to get rid of Iba Kabash before the time appointed in the message. So he was alone when he went slowly along the stone balcony to a dark corner. The slaves had retired from the banquet-place and the *fedavie* were watching for Halen ibn Shaddah to come from his quarters. Standing so that he could not be seen by those below, Khlit waited. Waited until the torches came, with the *Dais* and the huge figure of Halen ibn Shaddah. He felt a touch on his coat, and turned.

"Follow," whispered the soft voice of the Persian, "and do not tread clumsily."

Khlit found that this was not so easy. Berca carried no light. He could barely see her cloaked form by the reflection of an occasional candle as she passed swiftly through chambers and rock passages. His head was light from the wine, although his mind was clear.

Berca kept to passages where there were few persons, and these Khlit saw to be slaves. She was taking him through the slave quarters where he had not been before. Through corridors that narrowed until he had to turn sideways to pass; by sunken walls which smelled evilly. Through a corridor that led out of the chambers of Alamut into the paradise of Halen ibn Shaddah.

Khlit paused in amazement and felt of his head which was throbbing. A half-moon glimmered down at him, and a cool night wind played in his hair. The branches of date trees stirred lazily. Under his feet he could feel grass, and he saw one of the strange birds that dragged its tail come from the shadow of the date trees.

Berca shook him angrily by the arm.

"One without sense, eater of swine flesh!" she hissed. "Are you a clown to gape at strange things?"

A FOUNTAIN threw its spray on the wind into Khlit's face, with a scent like the roses of Ispahan. Below the fountain was a canal, which Khlit remembered vaguely, with a boat attached to the shore. In the water he could see the reflection of the moon gleaming at him. And he was dizzy.

"This is the paradise of Halen ibn Shaddah," he muttered unsteadily, "where I came by his favor. So Rashideddin told me."

Berca peered up at him silently. Her cloak fell back and Khlit saw the dark masses of hair which fell on either shoulder, and the white throat under the curved dark mouth that was twisted in scorn.

"A weak fool," she stormed, shaking him. "Toctamish is a better man than you."

"Toctamish is drunk. Nay, little Sparrow, it is my head. It will be better presently. This is no dream. How did you come to Alamut, little Berca?"

For answer the girl drew Khlit, who was fighting the dizziness in his head, to the canal, and into the boat. Pushing it from the shore, she paddled in the water until it floated into the shadows. Not content with this Berca urged the craft along the bank quietly, and Khlit who was flat on his back saw the shadow of a bridge fall over them.

"Nay," he said drowsily, "the stars are good. It is good to see them again. Where are we now? How did you bring me here?"

Berca came and sat by Khlit's head, feeling his hot forehead with a small hand. She wrapped her thin cloak tightly about her and rested her chin on her two hands, gazing at the round moon in the water.

"A man must be crafty and wise," she repeated softly, "yet, lo, it is a weak girl, a creature of the false prophet's paradise, who leads him. They told me you were very shrewd, oh, my Abulfetlah Harb Issa, gray Father of Battles. Soon there will be a great battle and the waters of Shahrud will be red again. Have you ever seen wolves of the steppe tear jackals of the mountains into bits, foam-flecked? Have you ever run with the pack of wolves, oh, one called the Wolf? Nay, they have clipped your fangs."

"That is a lie, Sparrow," growled Khlit surlily, "give me a horse and freedom to swing a sword, and I shall trounce some of these evil *fedavies* for you. Bah, it is a hotbed of sin, a reeking plague-house. Show me the way out of Alamut."

"And your promise," queried Berca, "to cut off the head of Halen ibn Shaddah?"

Khlit was silent. True, he had promised, and was in honor bound to Berca.

"Likewise, Berca," he said moodily, "you said that there was a plan. Why do you keep the plan hidden in your mind, if there is one? Better be in good faith with me. Say how Halen ibn Shaddah can be killed."

"How should I kill so strong a man?" she laughed softly. "The Koran reads that Allah weakens the stratagems of misbelievers. Also that they who store up evil shall taste what they store up. Such are the words of wisdom, despised by Rashideddin. Nay, destruction shall come upon Alamut like the storm from a cloud, quick as poison from a serpent's fang, and Halen ibn Shaddah——"

"Halen ibn Shaddah," chuckled Khlit, "is not easily to be found."

Abruptly, he gripped the girl's wrist. Beside the round orb of the moon in the water he saw the reflection of a turbaned man. It was a stout man, carrying a sword as broad as a horse's neck, or the reflection lied. Khlit rose on one elbow fingering his saber. At the same time the boat moved backward silently under impulse of the girl's paddling and passed from the bridge along the canal under date trees.

"A *eunuch*, one of the tribe who guard the creatures of the paradise," Berca whispered. "I have seen them often, because I am, also, a celestial houri—while it pleases me. I saw you when you came here a few days ago. Listen—" her voice changed—"for you must serve me, and the time is near."

Khlit nodded. The fresh night air had cleared some of the poison from his brain.

"I shall take you back to the chambers of Alamut, Khlit, by way of the slaves' quarters. We are on the top of Alamut, now, where Halen ibn Shaddah, whom may Allah lay in the dust, has built an evil paradise on the ruins of the old citadel to beguile his men. Verily what they have made—he and Rashideddin—is a magician's trick. The men who come here are drugged with a strange poison that I know not. I have tasted it in the wine—may Allah grant me mercy—and it is evil."

Khlit grunted in assent.

"It is some secret of Rashideddin's," she resumed. "The *fedavie* are foul with it, until they lose fear of death. This drug chains them to Halen ibn Shaddah. That and their lusts. And they have chained others by fear of the *Refik*. Yet their doom is near. It is coming from there—" pointing in the direction which Khlit thought to be north—"and it is swift as the hunting falcon on the wing."

"Another riddle, Berca," muttered Khlit. "Where have you seen a falcon?"

"Where you have seen them, Cossack," she laughed, "and Toctamish has hunted with them. Where swords are sharpened for the cutting down of the *fedavie*. In the land of the Kallmark Tatars, north of the Salt Sea. Oh, the doom of Alamut will be very great, and Munkir and Nakir, the dark angels that flay dead men in their graves will grow big with power."

"Another riddle, little Berca. It is many generations since Tatar horsemen rode into Persia for conquest."

"The answer is under your blind eyes, Father of Battles. Am I not beautiful as the rose garden of Tiflis in Spring? Is not my hair dark as the mantle of Melik, and my skin white as aloes under the dew?" Berca moved her perfumed head close to Khlit, and the Cossack drew away. "Nay, others have eyes; so, Allah has willed that my honor shall be cleared and the doom of Alamut shall come."

"The Tatars are marching on Alamut?" Khlit bit his mustache in glee. "Devil take me, that is good news——"

"Hush, fool." Berca drew in her breath eagerly. "Twenty thousand horsemen are riding along the Salt Sea toward Alamut. They will not stop to plunder or gather spoil. Oh, it will be a good battle. My father shall see it from the footstool of Mohammed. Aye, it will gladden his eyes. I shall open the gate of Alamut to twenty thousand Kallmark horsemen. The gate that leads to the banquet-place, where I bring food every night with the slaves. Here is what you must do, Father of Battles——"

She listened intently for a moment. The paradise of Halen ibn Shaddah was still, and only the birds with long tails moved.

"On the third night, Father of Battles," she whispered, "the *Dai* who is in command at the river stair, will change his sentries at the second watch. Do you and Toctamish get among the sentries of the river gate. I have seen you with Iba Kabash who is one without honor. Pay him and it may be done. Two sentries are as is the custom, in the river, outside the gate. On the third night, those two must be you and Toctamish, none other. That is your task. Then will you have a horse to ride, you and Toctamish. Meanwhile, keep out of sight of Rashideddin——"

"Aye," said Khlit, pondering, "Rashideddin."

## XI

IT IS written in the annals of Abulghazi that as the year of the lion drew to its close, very great riches came to the treasury of Halen ibn Shaddah from the cities which lived in the shadow of fear. Save from the north, by the Salt Sea, where the tithes came not.

Nor any riders. And in the north, said Abulghazi, a storm was gathering, swift as wind, rolling up all in its path. Yet no murmur of the storm came to Alamut, to the man who named himself prophet of God, to the banquet-place of the *fedavie*, to the man of wisdom, Rashideddin.

It was the second day after the visit of Berca that Khlit, who had been thinking deeply, sought out Iba Kabash where the Kurd lay sleeping on the floor of the banquet-place and roused him from his stupor.

"I have news for the ear of Halen ibn Shaddah himself," he said, squatting and lighting his pipe, "none other. He will surely reward me."

Iba Kabash ceased yawning and into his lined face came the look of a crafty fox.

"Halen ibn Shaddah will not see you, Khlit. He will see nobody except a few, old fellows of Alamut, of whom I am one. Verily, I have the ear of the master of Alamut. Tell me your message and I will give it, for you are a man of brains. You, Khlit are of the chosen. The others are ones without understanding."

Khlit knew that Iba Kabash lied, for the most part. He considered his pipe gravely and shook his head.

"My news is not to be repeated. Halen ibn Shaddah would pay a good price. How can you get such a good price for it as I?"

"Nay," remonstrated the Kurd, "I shall get a better price. For I know well the value of news. Tell me and we shall both profit, you and I."

Khlit grinned under his mustache. For a while he played, with the skill of one who understood the game well, with the growing inquisitiveness of his companion. Iba Kabash steadily raised the reward he assured Khlit, as he sensed the interest of the Cossack.

"Then," stated Khlit slowly, "you will do this. You will go direct to the master of Alamut and tell him my news. To no other. For here, a man takes what credit he can. And as the price of the good you will get for the telling, you will aid me in the plan I have. The plan concerns a girl that Halen ibn Shaddah would give a finger of his left hand to see brought before him."

"I swear it," said the Kurd readily, "on my *ahd*, the oath of a *fedavie*. Now tell me the news, and it shall go to Halen ibn Shaddah as you have said."

Khlit nodded. That much the Kurd would do, he was sure. Whether Iba Kabash would tell the source of his message was dubious. Khlit felt in his heart that if the news was important Iba Kabash would keep the credit for himself. Which was what Khlit wanted.

"Tell Halen ibn Shaddah this," he said slowly, "that Khlit, the Cossack, called the Wolf, has learned that Berca, the Persian girl who was sent from Rudbar by Rashideddin has returned, and is in Alamut. He will be very curious. Say no more, for you and I, Iba Kabash, can find the girl and take her to him. If you help me, it can be managed. That is my message."

Khlit watched the Kurd depart nimbly. Iba Kabash had sensed the importance of the Cossack's words. It would be a rare tale to pour into the ears of the master of Alamut. And, nimbly as the Kurd took his way from the banquet-place, Khlit was as quick to follow, keeping in the shadows of the passages, but well within sight of the other.

So it happened that Iba Kabash did not see Khlit when he turned into the winding stair that led to the room of Rashideddin, but the Cossack saw him and waited by the outer chamber. If Iba Kabash had looked behind, he might not have gone where he did. Yet he did not look behind, and Khlit waited patiently.

Presently one of the Khirghiz men came from the winding stair, walking idly, and Khlit halted him, asking if the Khirghiz had seen aught of a certain Kurd called Iba Kabash.

The man had seen him. Iba Kabash had come to the astrologer's chamber. Of a certainty, he had spoken to Rashideddin. Why else had he come? Was the astrologer one to stare at? They had talked together, and he had not heard what was said, although he listened carefully, for it was in another tongue.

Rashideddin, swore Khlit, was a man to be feared. Doubtless he was the one that spoke most often to Halen ibn Shaddah, the holy prophet. Nay, he surely had the ear of Halen ibn Shaddah, who held the keys to the blessed paradise.

The Khirghiz swore even more fluently. It was a lie that Rashideddin spoke with Halen ibn Shaddah more than others. Rashideddin was favored by the dark powers, for he read books. The Khirghiz knew that, for he was one of the chosen *fedavie* of the astrologer.

Khlit turned, at a step on the stair. Instead of Rashideddin, he saw the stout figure of Iba Kabash who halted in surprise.

"Listen, Cossack," the Kurd whispered, with a glance around the chamber. "I have not yet delivered your message, for Rashideddin stopped me on my way to Halen ibn Shaddah, and ordered me to bring you to him. But do not tell Rashideddin what you know. I shall see that you get a good reward, I swear it. We must try to get the girl. If you know a way tell me, and it shall be done. Remember, say nothing to Rashideddin."

Khlit weighed the words of the Kurd for their gist of truth and found very little. He little liked to face the astrologer, but he ascended the stair at once, swaggering, and stamping his boots.

In the round chamber of the astrologer he halted. It was night and candles were lighted around the tapestried walls. Rashideddin was crouched over rolls of parchment and instruments the like of which Khlit had not seen. In a cleared space on the floor in front of him the wise man of Alamut had ranged a number of images, silver and cleverly wrought, of stars.

The stars formed a circle and in the circle was a bag. Rashideddin sat quietly, arms crossed on knees, staring in front of him. Around the walls of the chamber silk hangings had been placed, on which were woven pictures of scenes which Khlit recognized as belonging to the paradise of Halen ibn Shaddah.

"Seat yourself, Cossack," said Rashideddin, in his slow, deep voice, "in front of me, and watch."

THE astrologer's eyes were half-closed. Looking into them, Khlit could see nothing. The room was still and deserted except for the two. Khlit wished that others had been there. He felt ill at ease, and sucked at his pipe loudly.

"In the place of darkness, of the spirit Munkir," said Rashideddin, "there are no stars. Yet when men are alive they can look on the stars. Few can read them. From Alamut I have seen them, and learned many things. Do they read the stars in your country, Cossack?"

"Nay," said Khlit, "we know them not."

Rashideddin contemplated his circle thoughtfully. His hands, yellow and very clean, took up a pair of dividers with which he measured the distance between the silver stars.

"In the heart of Alamut, we have burned the law books of the Persians and the code books of the Medes. They were very old; yet is the dust of age a sacrament? What is there about an old law that makes it graven as on stone in the minds of men? One prophet has said that he who takes a tooth for a tooth is lawful; another has said that he who injures another for his own sake shall suffer greatly. Which is the truth?"

"Nay," answered Khlit, "I know not."

"It was written that when one man kills another the kin of that man shall kill the first. So I have seen many in the world outside Alamut kill each other without cause. Yet in Alamut, we kill only for a reason."

Khlit thought of the dead Tatar who had fallen where Rashideddin sat and was silent.

"Watch," said the astrologer. Putting aside his dividers, he took up the bag. Opening the top of this slightly he held it over the circle in both hands. Tipping it to one side, he allowed a thin stream of sand to fall in the space enclosed by the stars. The sand heaped itself in mounds, which Rashideddin considered carefully, setting down the bag.

"There are laws in the stars, Cossack," he repeated, tracing idly in the sand with his dividers. "And I have read them. Is it not true that when a man has found the sum of wisdom, he has none? The poet has said that no beauty is in the world save that of power over other men. The stars watch the evil and idleness of men. One who reads them learns many things. I shall tell you what I learned of you, Cossack."

"Aye," said Khlit grimly, "tell."

Under the cover of his bushy eyebrows he studied his companion. Rashideddin was a magician, and in Khlit's mind a magician was not to be trusted. Was the astrologer playing with him, using him as a chess-player moves a piece on the board? What had Iba Kabash told Rashideddin? Khlit waited, paying no attention to the stars or the sand, watching only the eyes of the other.

"From the land of Ukraine you came, Khlit," said the astrologer. "Alone, and met Toctamish in Astrakan. When the wolf runs with the jackal over the steppe, the stars have a riddle to solve. Perhaps the wolf is hungry. And the jackal is useful."

"Aye," said Khlit, "Iba Kabash."

Rashideddin's expression did not change as he stirred the sands with his dividers. "At Astrakan there was a *fedavie* who is dead. You and the jackal Toctamish were under his roof. You came with him to a ship. And the *fedavie* was slain. Aye, the wolf was hungered. Much have I learned from the stars. There was a girl with you on the ship. She did not come with you to Alamut."

Khlit made no response, and Rashideddin continued to stir the sands.

"The girl was not one easy to forget. You have not forgotten her. The jackal is drunk. But you have an ear for wisdom. The girl might be found in Alamut. Aye, by one who knows her, in the thousands of slaves."

Khlit shook the ashes from his pipe. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the hangings move behind him. Well he knew the chamber of Rashideddin was pregnant with danger. The pallid astrologer toyed with men's lives as he did with the magic sands. He made no move, waiting for what was to come.

It came in a blinding flash. A burst of flame, and the sands leaped upward. Smoke and a wrenching smell filled Khlit's eyes and throat. The skin of his face burned hotly. Blinking and gasping, he rocked back on his haunches.

"The wolf is wise in the ways of the steppe," purred the astrologer. "Yet he came to Alamut, the vulture's nest. It is a pity. The girl, too, is missing. Perhaps she can be found."

The face of Rashideddin stared at him through thinning clouds of powder smoke, and Khlit wiped the tears of pain from his eyes. Rapidly, he thought. Rashideddin wanted Berca. Halen ibn Shaddah would pay a high price for the girl, who was dangerous, being not as other girls.

"Aye," he muttered, coughing, for the flame had burned his face, "she may be found."

"Tomorrow there will be an audience by Halen ibn Shaddah for the *fedavie*. She will be there. I shall send for you before evening. Fail, and the *fedavie* will break your bones slowly, with stones, or tear the skin from your back."

Khlit rose to his feet without obeisance.

"Have the stars," he asked, "any other message for me?"

For a long moment Rashideddin studied him through narrowed lids. Idly, the dividers traced patterns in the powder ash in the circle of stars. And Khlit cursed himself softly. For in the eyes of the other was the look of one who measures swords. Once too often he had drawn the attention of the astrologer on himself.

Dismissed from the round chamber, Khlit sought out Iba Kabash, and secured the promise of the Kurd that he would be put with Toctamish among the sentries for the next night, for being admitted to the paradise of Alamut this was their privilege. To gain this point, it was necessary to assure the Kurd that Berca could be found. Once more, Iba Kabash swore Khlit would get a good price, whereupon Khlit had the thought that the other was too glib with a promise.

Then he found Toctamish, and told the Tatar enough of what had passed in the garden of Halen ibn Shaddah to keep him sober overnight. This done, Khlit seated himself in a corner of the banquet-place and took out his sword. Placing it across his knees he began to whet it with the stone he always carried. As he did so, men near him stared curiously, for Khlit was singing to himself in a voice without music.

And Rashideddin sat over the circle of silver stars, tracing and retracing patterns in the ashes of powder, with the look of one in whose soul there is no peace.

## XII

CAME the time of the *divan*, the assembly of the *Refik*, and closed gates that guarded the apartments of Halen ibn Shaddah in the cellars of Alamut swung open. In poured the followers of the *Refik; fedavie*, hillmen of Persia, men of the Khirghiz steppe, *janissaries* of Yussouf, prince of princes. Scattered in the crowd were magicians of Rashideddin in white tunics and red girdles, in company with white and gold *Dais*. Also came Khlit with the Khirghiz chief who had seen fit to keep at his side.

The throng moved in silence, and Khlit waxed curious at this, until he questioned the Khirghiz. For reply, he received a hard blow in the ribs.

"You are surely a fool, Cossack," growled the other, "to bray at what is strange. We are walking through the talking chambers of the *Shadna*, built by Ala-eddin. Harken." He lifted his voice in a shrill syllable. "Aie!"

Instantly the sound was taken up and repeated through the corridors. A hundred echoes caught the word and flung it back. Shrilly, gruffly, it rang further into the caverns. Men near them stared and cursed. Khlit observed that the corridors were lofty and vaulted, with pillars of stone.

"It is said," whispered the Khirghiz, gratified by the effect of his experiment, "that before the time of Rashideddin, when the *Refik* prayed to Allah, these were the chambers of prayer. A man could pray a thousand times with one word."

"And now?"

"We do not pray."

Pushing a way through the crowd recklessly with his elbows, the Khirghiz gained a place where he and Khlit could see the array of the *divan*. In the center of a cleared space in one of the larger chambers stood Halen ibn Shaddah, easily marked by his great height and the cloak that shadowed his face. Around him were grouped certain men in heavy turbans and green embroidered coats. These Khlit recognized as *Daikebirs*, emissaries of the master of Alamut. At his side was the bent figure of Rashideddin.

These were talking in a tongue that Khlit did not know, not loudly, for fear of disturbing the echoes. His eye wandered over the throng. Wandered and halted. A woman's figure stood out from the crowd and he swore under his breath. Arm's length from Rashideddin among the *Dais*, her blue cloak closely wrapped on her slender form, stood Berca. Her black curls were pushed under a fold of the cloak; her brown eyes, darting from under fringed lashes, swept about the gathered *Refik* and passed Khlit by in unconcern. Yet he felt that she had seen him.

No other woman was present. Khlit saw that the eyes of many searched her, and he touched the Khirghiz on the shoulder.

"Is there talk about the woman?" he asked softly. "Tell me."

The chief listened, tolerantly, for a space. "Aye," he said, "there is idle talk. The woman is the daughter of a hill sheik. She was sent to be the wife of Kiragai Khan. That is a good jest, for Kiragai Khan loves not the *Refik*. She has said that she was sent without a dowry. So, the painted flower has come to one who tramples on flowers, to ask that the dowry be given her."

"And will it be done?"

"Will the tiger give up its slain victim? Nay, you are without understanding, Cossack. Halen ibn Shaddah does not play with such. The sheik's daughter will find a place among the slaves, not otherwise."

"Such is not the law."

"There is no law in Alamut but one—the word of Halen ibn Shaddah. And the law that the curved dagger must avenge a wrong."

Khlit made no reply, considering carefully what had been said. Rashideddin, then, had found Berca as he had declared he would. Was it Berca's purpose to come before Halen ibn Shaddah? Had she forgotten the cunning and cruelty of the man who had dishonored her? Perhaps the girl's pride had impelled her to appeal for justice and a wedding dowry to give the khan to whom she had offered herself. Yet Berca had not forgotten the manner of her father's death, of that Khlit was sure. Wise in the ways of men, the heart of the sheik's daughter was a closed book to him. He looked around for Toctamish. The Tatar was not to be seen.

Meanwhile, Rashideddin had been speaking to the girl.

"What said the astrologer?" asked Khlit.

"The old one is crafty," grunted the Khirghiz. "Aye, he has learned the secrets of magic where Marduk hangs by his heels in the hell of Babylon. He asked why a girl so fair in face and form should bear a gift in offering herself in marriage."

Berca, who seemed to ignore her peril, lifted her dark head and answered quickly in tones that stirred the echoes.

"Hah, the painted flower has a sharp tongue," grunted the chieftain. "She says that her beauty has moved the heart of Kiragai Khan as wind stirs fire. The khan, who desires her, would have taken her for his favorite wife. Yet would she not, being ashamed for reason of the trick Halen ibn Shaddah played her. So she has come back to ask a dowry from the hand of the master of Alamut, who is her lawful ruler now that her father is dead."

The giant form of Halen ibn Shaddah turned on Berca, and a peculiarly shrill voice reached the ears of Khlit. Once more he wondered what kind of man was the master of Alamut, of the giant figure and shrill voice.

"Halen ibn Shaddah says," whispered the other, "that Berca belongs to Alamut. She has returned to Alamut and here she must stay."

Khlit thought of the paradise of the master of evil, and understood why the eyes of the *fedavie* in the throng burned as they stared at the girl's slender figure outlined in the blue cloak.

"She asked for justice—" he began.

"Nay," interrupted the Khirghiz carelessly, "her father was slain by Halen ibn Shaddah. How is she then to be trusted?"

Khlit did not answer. For the gaze of Berca had met his. In it he read anxiety, and a warning. Slowly her glance crept to Rashideddin and back. Again. And Khlit saw the astrologer turn to leave the chamber.

Truly, he considered, the sheik's daughter was daring and proud. And, obeying her look, he followed Rashideddin, slipping away from the Khirghiz.

So it happened that when the astrologer left the *divan*, Khlit did likewise. Rashideddin made his way quickly and alone down one of the corridors without waiting for a light. Khlit followed him, keeping as close as he could without being seen. Presently both halted.

A voice called through the corridor clearly, and seemingly very near.

"A man must be crafty and wise," the voice of Berca came to their ears, "when danger is 'round his path, else is his labor vain."

Khlit crossed himself in astonishment. For a moment he had forgotten the echoes of the corridors of Ala-eddin.

## XIV

RASHIDEDDIN went straight to the winding stairs that led to his own apartment. At the foot of these stairs Khlit, who had traced the astrologer closely, paused. It would not be easy to go farther without being seen. And this Khlit wanted to avoid. He believed that Rashideddin was having him watched, and that the Khirghiz had attended him to the *divan* under orders. And at all costs he must be free to act that night.

Rashideddin, thought Khlit, sensed something impending. In some way the magician of Alamut kept himself informed of what went on in the citadel. His spies were everywhere. And on the night when Berca planned to admit the enemies of the *Refik*, both were under watch. Where was Toctamish?

Khlit wasted no time by the foot of the winding stair. There were other entrances to the circular chamber where Rashideddin kept his henchmen, and the Cossack cast about until he came to one of these. A passage led upward, unlighted in the direction he sought and this Khlit followed until he came to a curtain which he suspected divided it from the chamber of the astrologer. Beyond the curtain he could hear voices.

Lifting one edge of the hanging, Khlit looked out cautiously. Candle-light in the chamber dazzled him for a moment. He made out a dozen figures, Rashideddin not among them, dressed in the red and white of the magicians' cult. They were grouped around a man prone on the floor. This man was Toctamish.

The Tatar's coat and shirt had been removed. Two *fedavie* held each of his arms outstretched on the floor. His thick chest was strangely red, and he gasped as if in pain, not once or twice, but long, broken gasps that shook his body.

As Khlit watched, startled, one of the *fedavie*, a gaunt Tatar with a pocked face, placed some brown dust on the chest of the prostrate man. Khlit recognized the dust. It was the same that had singed his face when he sat opposite Rashideddin.

Thrusting aside the hanging, Khlit stepped into the room. The *fedavie* took no notice of him, believing that he was one of Rashideddin's henchmen stationed in the passage. Toctamish, however, lifted his eyes, which gleamed as they fell on the Cossack. Khlit saw that his brow was covered with sweat, and that blood ran from his mouth.

The man of the pitted face lifted some brown powder and sifted it on the chest of his victim. Another pushed a torch into his hand. Khlit realized then how his companion was being tortured. The smell of burning in the air came from singed flesh. And Toctamish was feeling the angry hand of Rashideddin.

Khlit stepped to the side of the *fedavie* with the torch, and peered closely at Toctamish. He saw then what made the Tatar's chest red, of a strange shade. Strips of skin had been torn off over the lungs, and here the powder was laid. Khlit swore and his hand strayed to his sword. And fell to his side. The *fedavie* numbered a full dozen, armed, and able-bodied. To draw his sword would be to bring ten whirling around him.

Khlit had no love for Toctamish. Yet in this room the other had stood with his sword drawn beside him. And they had shared bread and salt. Toctamish was standing the torture with the stark courage which was his creed. The lips of the sufferer moved and Khlit bent closer.

"Kiragai Khan—Khan of the Horde," the cracked lips gasped, "tell him. Blood for blood. We have shared bread—and salt, and *arak*. Tell him."

The Cossack nodded. Toctamish was asking him to report how he had endured torture to Kiragai Khan who was advancing on Alamut at the head of his men, and claiming vengeance. He was weak, and seemed to have no hope of living.

"What said the dog?" muttered the *fedavie* with the torch who had been trying to catch what Toctamish whispered. He spoke in a bastard Tatar with a strange lisping. "He will not speak and Rashideddin has said that he must or we will hang by the heels."

"He is out of his mind," answered Khlit carelessly. "What must he tell?"

"He stuck a dagger into a *fedavie*, a Syrian, on the shore of the Salt Sea. A girl, Berca, the sheik's daughter, was there also. This yellow-faced fool must tell if the girl ordered him to do it. Bah! His skin is tough as oxen hide, and his flesh is senseless as swine."

"And he has not spoken?"

"Nay. Rashideddin was here and questioned him, but the Tatar cursed him."

Khlit scanned the face of Toctamish. The yellow skin was dark and moist with sweat. The eyes were bloodshot and half-closed. The mouth lifted in a snarl, disclosing teeth pointed as an animal's. He felt that Toctamish would not yield to the torture. And great love for the man whose courage was proof against pain rose in the heart of Khlit whose own courage was such that men called him the "Wolf."

"Aye," he growled, "blood for blood. That is the law of Alamut. And Kiragai Khan shall know."

He saw by a quick opening of the eyes that Toctamish caught his words.

"What say you?" queried the *fedavie.* "Kiragai Khan?"

Toctamish's knotted figure writhed under the hands of his captors. He spat, blood and foam combined, at the other.

"Aye," he groaned, "Kiragai Khan—lord of fifty thousand spears—chief of a hundred ensigns—master of Alamut."

"He speaks," interpreted Khlit swiftly, "of one Hulagu Khan who conquered Alamut. Tell Rashideddin. And cease the torture, for the man has nothing to confess."

The *fedavie* stared at Khlit suspiciously.

"Nay," he snarled, "shall we hang by the heels?"

He thrust the torch near the powder. There was a hissing flash, a smell of burning flesh. Toctamish's body quivered spasmodically and sank back. The eyes closed.

Under cover of the flare and smoke Khlit slipped back through the circle and sought the stair. Gaining this he did not pause until he had reached the inner gate of the underground citadel where a *Dai* was assembling his men to guard the outer gate by the river.

When Khlit, who was nursing in his brain the sight he had just left, went down the river stairs to his post in the River Shahrud, he found that his companion was the bearded Khirghiz chieftain.

The outer post of the guard around the citadel of Alamut was in a small nest of rocks several hundred paces from the entrance, and midway in the stream. So shallow was the river that they could wade out to the rocks. The Khirghiz led the way.

It was not yet the middle of the night, and a bright moon lighted the winding ribbon of the Shahrud that twisted between the rocky heights of Rudbar. The mass of Alamut showed dark, giving no sign of the evil world it concealed. A wind from the heights brushed Khlit's face and he breathed it in deeply, for he was nauseated by the stench of the caverns.

"You and I, Cossack," said the Khirghiz, seating himself unsteadily on a ledge of the rocks, for he had been drinking, "will keep the outer post."

"Aye," said Khlit, "you and I."

He stared out into the moonlight haze that hung over the river. Berca had said that he and Toctamish were to hold the outer post. From some quarter the horsemen of Kiragai Khan were nearing the gate of Alamut. Khlit realized that unless the attack came as a surprise the citadel was impregnable. A surprise might carry the Tatar horde into the entrance. Berca had said there was a way. And this was it. Yet, if a surprise was to succeed the Khirghiz must be disposed of. He had been drinking, but he was still watchful. No movement of the Cossack escaped him.

Quietly Khlit drew out a small vial. From this he poured a few grains of a white powder into his hand. Lifting his hand he made as if to take the powder into his mouth. The Khirghiz bent forward, and his face lighted with evil desire.

"Have you—" he began.

"Come, Brother," whispered Khlit genially, "we will be comfortable on the rocks. Is not the bread of the *Refik* the vintage of the Shadna to be eaten? Come."

The Khirghiz swore softly and held out his hand. In wine and food, the vintage of the Shadna was often in the hands of the *Refik* men. But not, except on expeditions of the Master of Alamut, or by costly bribery of the *Dais* was the pure powder of *hashish* to be had, the *hashish* that brought bright dreams of paradise and lulled the mind with pleasures, that hardened the souls of the men of Alamut, and steeled their hands to the dagger.

Khlit, who had discovered the secret of the drug through the babblings of Iba Kabash, quietly dropped his portion back into the vial. Later, he knew, the Khirghiz would want more and he had but a little.

## XIV

IT WAS not long before Khlit was alone. The Khirghiz lay at his side on the rocks, muttering to himself with enough *hashish* inside him to make an imbecile of an ordinary man. Khlit sat by his side, saber across his knees, and watched the moonlit sides of the heights that frowned down on him. On the slopes he could make out the shadowy outlines of droves of horses, and he wondered if the *Dais* were planning an expedition that night.

Usually, Khlit was not given to forebodings. Yet the black mass of Alamut rising at his back gave him the feeling of approaching danger, and when he scanned the shadows along the river they moved as if filled with the bands of drug-crazed *fedavie*. Especially, Khlit wondered if the spies of Rashideddin were watching him. Rashideddin had learned of the murder of the Syrian, had connected Berca with it, and Toctamish with Berca. Toctamish, at his order, had been tortured with such devilish cruelty that even the Tatar's fortitude might break down.

How much did the astrologer know of Berca's secret? Once the alarm was raised in Alamut a thousand swords would block the stairs at the river gate and the rope hoists of the slaves at the rear would be drawn up. There were no signs of activity that Khlit could see, but few ever saw the movements of the *fedavie*. Accustomed as he was to war on the steppe, he was skeptical of horsemen taking such a stronghold as Alamut.

Once the Tatar horde forced the entrance there would be a battle such as Khlit had never seen before. Himself a Cossack, he cared little whether *Refik* or Khan were the victor—except that he had sworn an oath, a double oath, that the life of the Master of Alamut, Halen ibn Shaddah, would fall to his sword. Wherefore, he waited patiently, eyes searching the road by the river where the invaders might come.

Berca had told him that twenty thousand Tatars were riding through the hills to Alamut. Yet the road was narrow and the way twisted. It would be hard to move quickly. And there were the horse-tenders on the hills who would give the alarm. Khlit had come to grant a grudging admiration to the sheik's daughter who had defied Halen ibn Shaddah. But she was in Rashideddin's hands, and the astrologer was the man Khlit had marked as most dangerous of the *Refik*.

Rising suddenly, Khlit drew in his breath sharply. Outlined against the summit of a hill he saw a horse and rider moving very swiftly. The man was bent low in his saddle and Khlit thought he saw the long cloak of the *fedavie* before the rider came over the brow of the hill. Half-way down the descent the horse stumbled and fell.

Khlit saw a dark object shoot from the rolling horse and lie passive, clear in the moonlight. The messenger, if such it was, of the *fedavie* would not reach his destination. And at the same time Khlit saw something else. Before his eyes as if by magic he beheld Kiragai Khan and thousands of his horsemen.

Then Khlit, surnamed the Wolf, buckled tight his belt and drew on his sheepskin hat firmly. There was to be a battle that would redden the waters of the Shahrud and, among the swords of the *fedavie* Halen ibn Shaddah was to be found.

Apparently there was nothing stirring on the mountain slopes of Rudbar except the shapes of the horse droves that drew down to the river as was their custom, awaiting the bands of the *Dais* which came out for mounts. Tonight there were no men issuing from Alamut. And it was only when one of the herds moved across the face of the moon that Khlit saw the tips of Tatar helmets moving among the horses, and understood why the horses seemed more numerous than before.

Even as Berca had promised, the Tatar horde was approaching the gate of Alamut. One of the herds reached the river's edge and pressed on, in the shadow of the hillside. Khlit could see the faces of men peering at him, and catch the glint of their spears. He gave a hasty glance at his companion. The man was sleeping heavily.

Familiar with the ways of the Tatars, the Cossack could guess how their whirlwind rush into Rudbar had cut off all news being sent to the citadel, and how, after dark, the *Refik* horse-tenders on the pastures had been singled out and cut down. One had broken away with the news that was to carry the doom of Alamut, only to fall by the river.

The foremost warriors had reached him, clinging closely to the sides of their horses. A low voice called out to him cautiously.

"You are the Cossack who will guide us?"

"Aye," said Khlit, "but the moon is bright here and there are others within the caverns. Are you ready to rush forward at once?"

"Lead," said the voice, "and we will follow. Lead us to the gate of Alamut and we will purge the devil's hole of its filth."

Khlit cast a quick glance at the hillsides. Other bodies were moving down. Some were nearly at the river. Thousands were coming over the hillcrest. More were coming by the river road. On the far flanks detachments were moving to the rear of Alamut.

Drawing his sword, he sprang down into the river and splashed toward the shore. Dark forms closed in beside him, and the welcome stench of sweat and leather filled his nose. The river was full of moving forms, and horses that dashed, riderless, to either side. Khlit's heart leaped, and his clasp tightened on his sword. One of the foremost caught him roughly by the arm. Khlit had a quick glimpse of a dark, lined face and flashing eyes.

"I am Kiragai Khan, Cossack. Where is Toctamish? He was to stay by the side of Berca!"

"She sent him to watch with me. Yet, very likely he is dead by now."

The other swore, as they gained the shelter of the caverns.

"Take me to her, then," he snarled.

So it happened that before the light of day touched the date trees on the summit of Alamut, citadel of the *Refik*, and place of plague and evil, the first of the horde that had ridden from the shores of the Salt Sea entered the river gate, overcoming a few guards, forced their way up the stair, and spread through the passages of Alamut, making no sound but silently, as tigers seeking their prey.

## XV

IN THE annals of Abulghazi it is written how, in the year of the lion, came the doom of Alamut. The *Refik* folk were cornered in the cellars of the citadel, and taken by surprise. The swords of the Kallmark Tatars flashed in the passages, and their sharp arrows sped through the corridors. And, as the prophecy said, the waters of the Shadrud were red.

Yet in the book of Abulghazi and the annals of the Persian dynasties there is nothing said of the fate of Halen ibn Shaddah who was the last leader of the *Refik*. The followers of Kiragai Khan sought through Alamut from the wine chambers to the gardens among the ruins on the summit, and they did not find Halen ibn Shaddah.

The battle was not over for many hours. Separate bands of mounted Tatars had surrounded the height on which Alamut stood, and when throngs of slaves, and the eunuchs with the houris of the gardens swept out from hidden tunnels and were lowered over the wall, they were cut down. They were not spared, for that was the word of Kiragai Khan. The *fedavie*, cornered, and led by their *Dais*, rallied and attacked the columns of invaders which were penetrating to the heart of Alamut.

The Tatars without their horses and fighting in the gloom of the caverns were at a disadvantage, which was offset by greater numbers and the leadership of Kiragai Khan. For the *fedavie* had no leader. Messengers who sought through the tapestried apartments of the Shadna for Halen ibn Shaddah found none but panic-struck *Daikebirs*. The tide of battle flung the *fedavie* back to the banquet-place, and to the treasure-house beyond. If there had been a leader they might have held the dark passages until the Tatars were sickened by the slaughter of their men.

Such was the doom of Alamut. Torches flaring through chambers hung with gold cloth and littered with jeweled statuary from Trebizond, with silk rugs of Ispahan. Swords flashing in dark tunnels, where naught was heard but the gasping of men bitten by steel and the sound of bodies falling to the earth. Wailing and lamentation in the gardens under the date trees which were the evil paradise of Halen ibn Shaddah, and the splash of stricken women in the canals. Dark-faced, squat men in mail and fur cloaks trampling through treasure-rooms where the riches of a thousand caravans and a hundred cities stood.

Never had the followers of Kiragai Khan taken spoil so rich. Pearls from Damascus, golden fish from Che-ting, emeralds and sapphires from Tabriz, urns of gold shekels from the merchants of Samarkand and ornaments from the califate of Bagdad that would grace the court of a Mongol emperor. Slant eyes of the Kallmark horsemen widened, and they urged their dogs into the rivers of wine in the gardens, ripping into shreds rugs and hangings, splintering porcelain *kiosks* with rocks, and trampling on the bodies of the dead. Few lived.

And still the Master of Alamut was not found. Once Iba Kabash, who had attached himself to the winning side, and was spared because he brought Berca safe to Kiragai Khan, paused beside the body of a very large man, cloaked and jeweled. But he spurned it with his foot when he turned it over, for the giant face was that of a black eunuch.

Yet there was one who said he had found Halen ibn Shaddah. Iba Kabash, who was eager to find favor with his new lord, offered, trembling, to take him to the circular chamber of Rashideddin. Berca came with them, for she was not one to leave the side of Kiragai Khan in battle, being the daughter of a hill sheik and not a Tatar woman.

They climbed the winding stairs escorted by the renegade with torch-bearers and armed Kallmarks. In the circular chamber of the astrologer they saw a strange sight. The room had been dark. By the flare of their torches they made out three men, two dead, and the third sitting on the floor. Kiragai Khan paused for a moment by the body of Toctamish, burned and bloody, for the man had been one of his lieutenants, and very brave.

"He died under torture, lord and Celestial Master," gibbered Iba Kabash, pointing. "For he would not tell of the queenly Berca, or the coming of the noble Tatars."

Kiragai Khan said nothing, passing to the next body, and pressing the hand of Berca when the girl cried out. This one was Rashideddin, his gray robe stained with red, and his lean face convulsed. His arms flung wide, and sightless, leering eyes staring upward through the opening to the stars, the astrologer had died in the grip of anger. Berca, leaning over him, watched vainly for a breath to stir the gray cloak. Seated beside Rashideddin she saw Khlit, wiping his sword calmly with a corner of the dead man's cloak.

"Have you seen Halen ibn Shaddah?" demanded Iba Kabash officiously. "The noble Kiragai Khan has missed you, since he came into the entrance of Alamut. Was it you that killed Rashideddin?"

"Aye," answered Khlit, looking up indifferently. "Have the Kallmarks or the *Refik* the upper hand? I have seen Halen ibn Shaddah."

"The battle is over, Khlit," exclaimed Berca pressing forward, but keeping the hand of the Tatar leader. Her eyes were shining, and she held her head proudly. "The doom of Alamut has come, as I swore it would. It was my will that it should, mine and my lord's. For I came to him without a gift and was ashamed. Yet did he marry me in spite of that. And I swore to him that if he would avenge my father such a gift should be his as no other bride could bring. Alamut would be his, with the treasure of the *Refik*. And now he has seen that the gift is rich. All that Halen ibn Shaddah had."

Khlit's glance sought that of the Tatar leader, and they measured each other silently.

"The way is long from Tatary," went on Berca, tossing her head, "but I am very beautiful in the sight of my lord, and he consented to my plan—to come to open the gate to him—saying only that Toctamish should come. I picked you, Cossack, as my father of battles. Yet I am grieved. You swore that you would slay for me Halen ibn Shaddah——"

"Have you seen," broke in Kiragai Khan gruffly, "the one who is called Master of Alamut?"

"Aye, he was here."

"Which way did he go? Speak."

"He did not go."

The khan looked around the chamber. It was empty except for the two bodies. A sudden blast of air from the opening overhead made the flame of the torches whirl, and cast a gleam on the face of Rashideddin as if the dead man had moved. Berca drew back with a smothered cry.

"The man who was called Halen ibn Shaddah," said Khlit, "was a eunuch of great size. The real Master of Alamut was another. He concealed his identity to avoid the daggers of those who would slay him. Yet is he slain. And I have kept my oath, Berca, princess."

The eyes of the others strayed to the body of Rashideddin, and rested on the red stains that garnished the gray cloak with the red ribbons of death. The blind eyes of Halen ibn Shaddah were fixed on the stars visible through the opening in the ceiling. And Khlit, seeing this, knew that he would be very glad to turn his horse again toward the steppe and away from Alamut.

# TO A SOLDIER

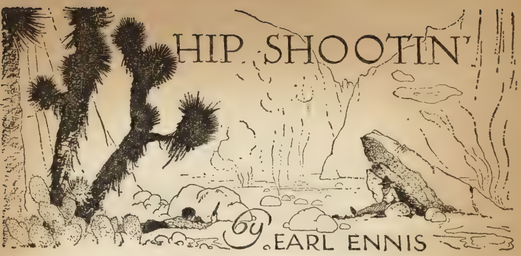
### BY RUTH LAMBERT JONES

"A GOOD start in business—
  Wasted!" you say.
That's your only regret
  As you march on your way.

What of your start
  In the business of living?
What of your start
  In the business of giving?

That others may live
  You are giving your all:
The business of Life—
  Do you count it small?

"A good start in business—
  Wasted!" you say.
  Man, you are starting
  Life's business today!



# HIP SHOOTIN'

By EARL ENNIS

*Author of "By Primitial Code."*

GRIT is one of the few remaining towns on the Mojave Desert that represents a survival of much that has passed away in other portions of the West.

Adobe houses, warped and crumbling from a half-century of sun and rain, a main street, double-flanked by saloons, and an array of horse-troughs, mongrel dogs and nondescript Mexicans, are still its chief characteristics. Many of the old-time traditions and habits still linger about the place, recalling the period when gold-dust was the chief currency at Roaring Jack bar, and sourdoughs went bravely out to loot the hills of their hidden wealth.

Among the things that still survived, when the events of this story occurred, was the official range pay-day, when sun-browned, lithe-flanked cowboys came riotously in from the south and east to waste the earnings of months over the green felt tables; the faro parties that lasted the night out, leaving the players heavy-eyed and spent, with empty pockets and the eternal hope of ultimate bonanzas burning in their brains; the perpetual arguments between cowmen and sheep-herders over the rights of the range. And then—not least among the institutions of Grit, there was Sheriff Bill Doble in his grimy-windowed office, adjoining the general store, with his rows of dust-hung law books and his picture gallery of reward placards.

Bill had been sheriff in Grit so long he had earned the repute of an institution. Like the alkali dust that filtered in with the Autumn sandstorms, and the night wind that bit down on the flatlands from the San Bernardino Mountains, old Bill, tilted back in his swivel-chair, rowelling the antique desk with his spurs, had become an integral part of local scenery. In Los Angeles, Bill would have been classified as a tourist attraction and the world taught to make a pathway to his door. But in Grit the world passed him by, when it passed at all, with a friendly salute, content that he stood sponsor for the law and order for which the town was famed afar.

Personally Bill was just the kind of a sheriff one would expect to find in a desert town. He was solid and substantial from his spurs to his snake-belted sombrero. What he had to say was short and pithy and his convictions left no room for misunderstanding. In fact, Bill never had but one argument, and that it had been but five times disputed was plainly on record. The heavy Colt six-gun that dangled from his belt bore carefully carved notches on the butt. The further reputation of always giving a "square deal" and of standing for unvarying honesty had brought the respect of the entire range country.

Such was the status of affairs when, into the even tenor of Grit's daily program, on a hot July night came "Buck" Saunders. Buck's advent was a bomb hurled into the tranquility of the town's regular routine, which left a changed order of things that is still discussed in reminiscence around camp-fires in the cow-country, when the "chuck" ceremonies are over and the branding crews rest from their strenuous labors.

As a foreword to the arrival of Buck

Saunders, mention of the transfer of "Rusty" McGee, roper and buckaroo, together with his "*caballo*" and his personal effects from the Hashknife rancho to the Double-O headquarters is of more than passing importance. For Rusty had considerable to do with Buck Saunders in the eventful days that ensued, albeit their arrival in the same territory was purely coincidental. Rusty came with a good recommendation, a mat of fiery red hair, and a cheerful smile—a bond on the range where men are appraised, and accepted or rejected, frankly on their face value.

Rusty McGee was Irish, which explains at once his hair, his grin and his eternal brag of himself, his family, and all that pertained thereto. Rusty had a brother Jim who was a ranger with the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police. To Rusty, the sun rose and set in Jim. He spent hours telling the Double-O boys about the wonderful things Jim had done up in the country where the lakes are fastened together and the bull caribou thunder down with the flare of the Northern Lights at their heels. At first it all made little impression. But water dropping upon a rock will eventually wear a dent, and after a time the punchers began subconsciously to absorb a little of Rusty's creed.

They were still in the preliminary stages of appreciation when Buck Saunders left his haunts on the Mesa Perdita, where he had been rustling cattle for a pastime, and set out for new worlds to conquer. He chose for want of something better, the gambling-house of "Money" Meek, which occupied a leading position among similar institutions in the town of Grit. As Johnnie Murray, foreman of the Hashknife rancho, who witnessed the whole episode, afterward described him, Buck was "an ornery varmint with a mean eye, who wore his sombrero on the hump of his nose, and packed a gun on each leg, with the toe of the holsters tied down for a greased lightnin' draw."

Buck picked a sweltering night when the place was full. He kicked open the swinging doors and walked in with a Colt in each hand. While two-score cowboys and sheepmen stood with upraised hands he made his wants known in succinct language. The situation was plain to even the stupidest Mexican among them.

"Git a move on," Buck adjured. "I got other business besides waitin' on you *hombres*."

Under the outlaw's direction, the bartender emptied the contents of the till and the faro-dealer's drawer into a bandanna handkerchief. Then he went through the pockets of those present and added what he found to the collection. The whole he handed to Buck, who tucked it in his shirt, backed from the place with a wary eye for possible gun-play, and disappeared from sight into the shadows of the night on a mean-faced pinto.

"And there we stood," said Johnnie Murray, "like five minutes to one, not a gun in the crowd, nobody havin' figgered on the genuine article payin' us a visit like that."

AS MIGHT be surmised, the hold-up formed the main topic for discussion at breakfast the next morning, when the Double-O outfit stamped into the ranch-house with the tingle of pump water still on their faces. Sheriff Bill Doble had come out of his lethargy, organized a posse and long before midnight had set out across the mesa on the trail of the bandit. Some of the punchers were optimistic about the result; others were noticeably silent. But Rusty McGee was openly scornful.

"Up in Canada," he said, "there wouldn't be no such tom-foolery as sendin' an army out to get a four-flusher like Buck Saunders. He's a one-man job. What's the matter? Is your sheriff gettin' old?"

The boys tried to explain that age cut no figure in the matter. That it was custom, dating back to time immemorial, and based upon the exigencies of the occasion and plain "hoss" sense. But Rusty McGee refused to see it that way. He argued that the thing was being overdone, and that a fugitive had his chances of escape increased by being able to both see and hear a posse, while a single officer, well armed and courageous, could run him down with greater surety.

"That's what Jim says," he added as a clinching argument, "and he ain't never lost a man yet."

Rusty's position was considerably strengthened when, along toward nightfall, the posse returned empty-handed and worn out with eighteen hours' fruitless beating of cottonwoods and mesquite. Johnnie Murray saw them first and he noted the general attitude of the riders. He nudged "Clothespin Mills" with his elbow and pointed toward the cloud of dust kicked up by the lagging hoofs of the animals.

"They done lost him," he commented. "That red-headed Rusty McGee ain't such a —— fool as he looks."

"The which I was thinkin' when I heard him palaver," agreed Clothespin sapiently.

The posse turned its horses into the Double-O corral for the night. They had few comments to make, being too tired and hungry for conversation. Sheriff Bill, always reticent, bordered on taciturnity. He ate his dinner in silence and vouchsafed only monosyllabic grunts to the questions plied by the curious punchers.

"Rodeo Sam," one of the posse and a wrangler from the Triangle-Z outfit, expressed the general sentiment in an undertone to Johnnie Murray as they were turning into the bunks for the night.

"Bill's takin' these things to heart more'n he used to," he said. "I remember when he used to liquor up and call it a night. He would say there is always a *mañana*."

"Mebbe he's wore out," suggested Johnnie Murray.

"Shouldn't wonder. Bill ain't so young as he used to be."

Johnnie Murray recalled Rusty McGee's remark and he found himself speculating.

The posse spent the rest of the week searching the foothill region without uncovering a trace of the outlaw. The hunt finally dwindled away to sporadic excursions into the cottonwood and yucca district in the hope that something might show which would approximate a clew. A score of inquiries spread broadcast through the medium of cattlemen failed to bring even a hint of the whereabouts of Buck Saunders, save that once a glimpse of a crouching figure on a pinto pony had been had by a passing sheepman at the lower end of the county.

While this was taking place, Rusty McGee was making the most of his opportunity for impressing the Double-O boys with his theory of the duty and obligations of a sheriff. Rusty had nothing against old Bill Doble. Down in his heart he held a secret admiration for him. But he could not help making comparisons between old Bill and his brother Jim. He meant to be fair. He tried to be just. But Rusty was a product of his race, and always it was the sheriff who suffered by comparison.

From an outspoken question regarding Bill's age and incident lack of capacity, as he saw it, he one day broke into open criticism. But there he fell afoul of one of the strongest traditions of the cow-country. For no matter what other faults the average range-rider may have, he is loyal to his sheriff. He will crawl out of a warm bunk on the coldest nights and ride through slush and mud and in pouring rain to go to his assistance. He is always ready with horse and weapon to support the man who wears the star to the limit of his ability.

Rusty, embarking upon his reckless censure of Sheriff Bill Doble's attainments, found himself suddenly jerked to earth and called upon for proof. Whereupon he swore by all the sacred standards of the carrot-haired McGees that he would one day adduce this evidence.

"I ain't sayin' that old Bill wasn't a regular hellion in his day," he would say in the lulls between "Sad-eyed Pete's" baritone solo on "The Deep Blue Sea" and the harmonica obbligato of "Latigo" Jones, "but that was a long time ago. Some one of these here days, Bill's goin' to come in all draped nice and neat over his saddle-horn, the same bein' proof plenty sufficient, he had got too old for fast work. You *hombres* 'll be feelin' some regretful about then, I'm thinkin'."

The boys of the Double-O would listen to his words and spit in the fire thoughtfully.

Rusty had his golden opportunity about a month later when Buck Saunders, tiring of inaction, dropped into San Luis, a sister city to Grit and farther north on the Mojave. One of the first places he visited was that of "Sandy" McPherson, a Scotchman, who ran the principal general merchandise store in the place. The streets were deserted, it being early in the day, and most of the inhabitants, save for the hangers-on, attending to such indoor duties as would keep them out of the morning heat.

The outlaw walked in and called for a tarpaulin. McPherson threw a stack on the counter and named the price.

"Too much!" snapped Buck.

"Take it or leave it," rapped back McPherson, turning on his heel.

The outlaw stared at him with an expressionless face. Then he whipped his revolver from its laced scabbard. Without a trace of visible feeling he shot the Scotchman twice, in the back, as he bent over a bin with a sugar scoop in his hand. McPherson fell to the bin and died there. Citizens of Grit, attracted by the sound of the shots, rushed to the spot, to find him with his feet sticking out of the bin grotesquely—his wife pulling helplessly at him. Buck, she said, had ridden away with the tarpaulin.

I RUSTY McGEE and some of the Double-O boys were in town at the time and came up with the rest. They got Sheriff Bill on the long distance and received his loud assurance that he would be right over. While they waited, the boys questioned the storekeeper's wife, who had been a witness of the shooting, as to what had taken place. From her, they gleaned as a striking fact that Buck Saunders had shot from the hip-line without raising his weapon.

"Can't you see?" bleated Rusty McGee. "He's a hip-shooter! They're the worst in the world. It's suicide to put old Bill up against a *hombre* like him. Now Jim says——"

But Latigo Jones interrupted the soliloquy.

"Oh, shut up, can't you, you bandy-legged maverick," he growled, jerking his head toward the terrified woman. "Ain't you got no sense at all?"

Rusty, realizing that he had picked the wrong time and place to stiffen his credit, relapsed into unwilling silence. But he was not to be suppressed.

When Sheriff Bill arrived he promptly split the Double-O in half, taking men he knew to be seasoned riders and best able to stand the long gruelling test to which they would be put. To these he added a handful of local friends of the dead man, out of respect to the latter's memory. In a few minutes, cow-punchers were scurrying in all directions, gathering ammunition and provisions, blankets and Winchesters. Within half an hour after Buck Saunders had shot down the peaceable Scotchman fifty well-armed, determined men were hot on his trail with Sheriff Bill Doble riding well in the lead on a big bay mare that was known to be one of the hardest and longest travelers on the range.

Rusty McGee was among the Double-O boys that Bill had selected to accompany him. He was a good rider, an excellent shot and, with all his talk, nerve and grit to the backbone. He had been picked with the rest at the suggestion of "Sawbones" Hawkins, foreman of the Double-O, who had been irritated at Rusty's criticism of the sheriff and wanted him to get acquainted with Bill Doble at close range. In this, the code of the cow-country was being followed to a nicety—the code which never seeks to change a man's opinions by argument, but leaves it to the more emphatic school of experience.

Straight out across the Mesa Perdita they rode, into the purple twilight haze, where turquoise and lavender met and mingled with crimson and gold. At their head rode "Indian Joe," an Indian trailer who was invaluable to every posse when trails turned to hard ground and aboriginal skill became more valuable than white men's logic. For the most part the men were silent, attending strictly to the business of conserving their mounts across the uneven ground. The only sounds were the jingle of bridles, the steady drum of the horses' hoofs, and the rattle of mile after mile of mesquite against the stirrup leathers, with now and then some brief comment of the trail.

The sky, which had been lowering all day, settled down at dusk into an ominous blackness. Little gusts of wind puffed in their faces, bringing odd desert odors. The mesquite gave way to matted chaparral and the jaws of Dead Man's Cañon closed in upon them. Clothespin Mills sniffed the air like a hound and muttered to himself.

"What say?" chirruped Latigo Jones, swinging in his saddle.

"Rain comin'."

"It's goin' to be nice ridin' tonight."

"Sure is. Where are we headin'?"

"The Johnson ranch, I reckon."

"I think old Bill's wrong on that."

"Same here. That maverick Buck Saunders never wasted no time comin' this way. He double-tracked back at Morgan's water-hole, and went south. That's where he hangs out. 'Bud' Stutz met him down there last week."

"Did you tell Bill that?"

"Bill was with me when Stutz told us about it. But Bill's got his own ideas. You can't argue with Bill."

"Well, I'd a heap sight rather bunk at the Johnson ranch than go stompin' 'round in the slush on a night like this."

He emphasized his remark with a glare at the lowering sky. Latigo Jones grunted his agreement.

"Well, you know the deal—fresh *caballos* at the Johnson ranch, and keep on goin'. I know Bill. He figgers on makin' Big Eye Butte by mornin'. You can see a heap of country from there, you know. Get me?"

"Yeah, I get you, but I ain't sayin' nothin'. Me—I'm doin' a heap o' thinkin'."

Rusty McGee had been an interested listener to the conversation. He swung his horse in closer and lowered his voice.

"What do you say we drop out and trail down by the water-hole way?" he asked.

"Not me," declared Clothespin with finality. "This here is Bill's own private funeral. Besides, there's hot grub ahead, and I'm strong for it."

The posse was in the cañon now. The way was narrow and the little band strung out in single file, picking its way among the boulders with difficulty. The work demanded their full attention and conversation lapsed. An hour's laborious riding, and they came out of the upper end. The lights of the Johnson ranch were just visible through the sudden night when the rain overtook them. By the time they reached the friendly shelter of the ranch buildings, the water was pouring down in torrents.

The severity of the shower changed the aspect of things. The boys turned their tired animals into the corral and clattered into the ranch-house, where Johnson, the owner of the place, gave them a cordial welcome.

"Fan up old Betsy," he said, jerking his thumb toward a cast-iron stove in the middle of the living-room. "I'll tell the Chink to hunt out some chuck steak and a pan of soda biscuits. Some rain, ain't it?"

The posse needed no second invitation. They stoked the fire, spread out their wet clothing and thawed themselves into some semblance of comfort. By the time the feed was ready, everybody was in better spirits. Buck Saunders became a remote wraith of rain and storm, to be forgotten until tomorrow.

"You ain't calculatin' on goin' on tonight, are you?" asked the ranch-owner, as they pushed back their plates and felt for pipes and cigaret papers. The sheriff shook his head morosely.

"No use," he replied. "Trail's plumb washed out. We'll hit it up at dawn."

The boys gave a sigh of relief. They wanted to round up the outlaw. But trailing through wet adobe in a pelting rain was mighty disagreeable. There was little chance they would overtake him with the dark in his favor. There would be better opportunity with the daylight. He would take a chance then of being seen by a passing herder or cowman. That would start a fresh trail. There was plenty of time. They do not ride to a kill in one day on the range. It is persistence and not the time element that counts in a desert man-hunt. So they settled down to the intricacies of stud poker in the bunk-house with the ropers from the ranch.

AT DAWN the following morning, with freshened mounts under saddle, the posse swung upward into the foothills. The sky had cleared and everything was new-washed and fresh. A lilac haze hung along the upper levels and in the distance the rugged outlines of Big Eye Butte stood out in relief like a sharp-cut cameo. The little cavalcade wound its way across the steaming earth, discarding known trails for less frequented roads, most likely to show a sign of the man they sought.

"I'll bet a squaw-hitch he turned off at that water-hole," snapped Rusty McGee, in growing irritation.

"Listens reasonable," opined Clothesipn Mills. "Reckon we might take a look 'round on the way back."

Accordingly, when late in the day, Sheriff Doble finally backtracked toward home, after hours of fruitless search through the "bad lands" of the mesa, the two cowboys dropped behind the rest. When they reached the water-hole they turned into an arroyo past a salt-lick, to where green stuff sprouting from the earth gave indication of hidden water. A brief space and they came to the hole itself, its edge stippled with innumerable cattle tracks running in all directions.

Rusty jumped from his horse and studied the ground closely. Clothespin hooked one knee over his saddle-horn and rolled a cigaret. As he licked his wheat-straw into position, a sudden exclamation from Rusty brought him to the red-headed roper's side.

"Look," said Rusty.

He indicated the mark of a shod horse in the sand. Beside it was the print of a man's boot—a high-heeled, Mexican boot of the type ropers wear to give a firm anchorage in the ground. Clothespin followed McGee's outstretched finger.

"It's Buck, sure as shootin'," said Rusty, his hand shaking.

"Humph!" ejaculated Clothespin, bending down for a closer inspection.

Rusty continued:

"He got off here for somethin', gave his animile just time to water and then kept on a-goin'."

Head down, he began to circle like a hound. Suddenly he swung off abruptly along the bed of the arroyo to a clump of underbrush. Gun in hand, he stepped through the bushes, Clothespin Mills at his elbow. Directly under a cottonwood tree a horse was tethered by a slim correa with a single knot. The animal whinnied as the two men came into view.

"Buck's hoss," exclaimed Clothespin, his mouth close to Rusty McGee's ear.

They stood silent and tense—listening. There was only the faint rustle of small ground-animals scurrying through the dry branches underfoot. Rusty waved the nose of his weapon at the animal.

"He changed animiles here," he commented. "This here is the one he was ridin' when he plugged Mac."

The two cowboys crept out into the open, alert for possible ambush. But they were unmolested. Earth trampled down by restless hoofs and tracks running east and west told the story to their trained eyes. It was as Rusty had said. The outlaw had tied an extra animal at the water-hole for emergencies. Riding to the utmost limit of his horse's speed, he had gained sufficient headway to give the beast a drink and change saddles. This done, he had ridden away again on a fresh mount, more than a match for the jaded posse behind him.

Rusty glanced along the bed of the arroyo where an ordinarily dry bed had become a creek from the downpour of the night before.

"Ain't no use in tryin' to foller him now," he said. "If we'd come in here last night we'd 'a' had him where he belonged, just like I thought."

Clothespin Mills scratched his head reflectively.

"We might get the boys and lay 'round in the bushes for awhile," he suggested. "He might come back after the *caballo*."

Rusty McGee shook his head.

"Not Buck." There was conviction in his tone. "He's too foxy to walk into anything like that. Nope—we just nachully lost him this time. That's all there is to it. "The next time I'm gonna use my own judgment—and not some other *hombre's*." He flung the last with sudden venom. "Jim told me a long time ago, when I was man-huntin' to play a lone hand. You can't never bet on any other fellow, he says."

Clothespin Mills dropped his weapon back into its holster and nodded his head thoughtfully.

"That's no lie," he said with conviction.

The finding of Buck Saunders' rendezvous and the manner in which Rusty McGee's judgment had been sustained in the matter of outlaw-hunting, as related by Clothespin Mills next morning to the Double-O contingent, raised the red-headed cow-puncher several notches in the estimation of his fellow ropers. His standing was still further enhanced when the outlaw, emboldened by his first success, held up two more saloons within the course of the next fortnight. One was in Pacheco, thirty miles from Grit. The other at Dubarte, just across the Mesa Perdita. In each case, Sheriff Bill Doble had gone out across the sands at the head of a posse in pursuit. In each case he had returned empty-handed and disgusted, conscious of a growing unrest among his men.

It was not that the posse blamed Sheriff Bill entirely. Buck was a genius for swooping down on an unprotected or unprepared community. In addition, he had a secret hiding-place somewhere in the bad lands to which he always returned when the hunt grew close, and which had not yet been discovered. Buck's habit was to lay low in the daytime and ride only at night. It was a combination hard to overcome in a desert country mostly wide, unguarded stretches of cañon and valley. A posse might ride all day and be no nearer the outlaw at sun-down than when it started.

It was after Buck held up and robbed the bank at Malona, in the middle of the day, shot the cashier blind, and escaped with his booty, and the posse saddle-weary and dusty, had returned without their man and carrying the realization that the outlaw had changed his night-riding tactics to open defiance, that matters came to a head.

From the minute Sheriff Bill gave the order to return home, after following an aimless trail into the Mohave sand, he was aware that there was a change in his men. Conversation dropped out entirely. Here and there he caught a furtive glance from beneath a hat-brim, supplemented by sullen mutterings and monosyllabic grunts. He was not surprised when they followed him into his office in Grit, and hung over his furniture in uncomfortable attitudes.

Johnnie Murray, foreman of the Hashknife rancho, cleared his throat and stepped forward, aided by the urgings of several elbows and covert glances of encouragement.

"Bill," he said, twisting his sombrero between nervous fingers. "The boys—that is—we——"

He glanced around the room, and receiving several nods of approval, gathered courage.

"You see, Bill, it's like this. You've been sheriff a long time now and you've done your share and a lot more. We ain't sayin' you ever fell down on the job. As far as that goes, I'd be the first to knock the block off'n any *hombre* that said different." He glared belligerently around the room. "But times has changed, and old ideas kinda bogs down like a chuck wagon in wet 'dobe. Huntin' a bad-man is—well, Bill, it's a young man's job. Get me? We been kinda talkin' it over, and while we ain't aimin' to discount nothin' you've done, Bill, we—that is—the boys, is hankerin' for a change of administration, sort of."

THE WAITED, and a dense silence fell on the room. Old Bill glanced around the circle. There was no eye to meet his own. The members of the posse sat or stood in uncomfortable postures, their eyes on their feet, the ceiling, out of the window—everywhere, except in his direction. Johnnie Murray was staring at a band of sunlight that came through the open window and made a pencil of yellow on the floor. Instinctively Bill followed the shaft of light until the distant hills, tinted with mellow, Autumn colors crossed his vision.

Yonder beyond those hills lay the great Mohave Desert. It was the one place in all the world he knew and loved best. The rolling dunes with their undulating outlines, the rugged sandstone outcrops that shoved through from beneath like a giant fist thrust upward; the flaming grandeur of the evening skies, more beautiful than a preacher's heaven; the fresh, fragrant mornings with the shifting colors of the dawn—it was all his world, his country, his life.

His best years had been spent there. Posse after posse he had led across the trails he knew like the lines in the palm of his hand. Man after man he had brought back to pay the price according to range-land's idea of justice. Until the coming of Buck Saunders, no outlaw in his territory had escaped the reckoning. The idea of quitting had never entered his head. He had expected, of course, to die in his spurs—most likely in the saddle. Now—they were making it plain to him that he had failed—"a young man's job"—Bill glanced once more at the circle that ringed him in.

There was a cold glint in his eyes now. So he was growing old, was he? Suppose his eye did hit fifty yards or so shy of his record and his leg latches were getting a might tight? Couldn't he pick a running jack from the saddle five times out of six with his old Colt yet, and do a day's riding with the best of them? Abruptly he straightened his shoulders and cleared his throat.

"You want me to quit—is that the idea?"

Johnnie Murray nodded, his eyes still on the shaft of light on the floor. His voice seemed to have left him.

Without a word Sheriff Bill unfastened his rusty star and dropped it on the desk. His handcuffs followed—and a bunch of heavy keys. From a drawer he took some private papers which he tucked in his pocket. Then he walked to the door.

"The blank warrants is in the top drawer and the code book's over yonder on the window-sill," he said. "The big key fits the jail door; the rest of 'em unlocks the desk." For the barest second he hesitated. "S'long, boys," he said, and banged the door behind him.

There was a dead silence for a full minute after Bill Doble left. "Red-eye" Weeks broke it derisively.

"Well," he ejaculated with elaborate sarcasm, "I hope you mavericks is satisfied.

Me—I'm goin' out and apologize to some low-down coyote for herdin' with a bunch of *hombres* like you. Pore ol' Bill!"

He kicked a chair across the room by way of emphasis and went out cursing torridly.

That afternoon, representatives of the ranches along the desert's rim met in the back room at Black La Farge's gambling-hall to select Sheriff Bill's successor. The Double-O, Hashknife, Stutz, Lazy-Fish and Circle-8 ranches sent delegates. The Stutz crowd suggested Johnnie Murray, owing to his reputation for daring and handiness with a gun. But the foreman of the Hashknife rancho declined the honor in a characteristic speech.

"Nix," he said, and his tone was emphatic. "I let myself be drawed into this mess ag'in my will, but I'm blamed if I'm goin' to wear any grave clothes to please a bunch of merry widows. If you-all's chuckle-headed enough to think you got a sheriff among you, why go right to it. I've done all the dirty work I'm going to. Me, knowin' the whole bunch of you, I opines you're a fine bunch of sucklin' doves —the same bein' all strut and no eggs. Huh!"

The speaker's remarks nettled Rusty McGee, whose tinder was always laid to flare.

"Oh, I don't know; there's some of us 'round here could make pretty blamed-good sheriffs, I'm thinkin'," he declared.

Johnnie Murray whirled and looked the red-headed roper in the eye.

"Rusty," he said. His tone was ominously quiet. "I call you. You're forever shootin' off your face; now, it's about time to make good. Come to think about it, it was considerable your kickin' that rowelled us into askin' old Bill to take a *pasear*. From your conversation, I now takes it you are makin' a bid for the job of bein' sheriff in his place. They not bein' any rush of can'dates to the fore, I moves the nom'nations be closed."

Somebody tittered and a laugh ran around the circle. Then the puchers saw that the Hashknife foreman was in earnest and the idea caught like wildfire. To the men from most of the ranches Rusty McGee was as good a chance as any other. To the boys of the Double-O outfit, the suggestion represented a chance to end Rusty's perpetual stream of conversation about "brother Jim." With all that talk on the left side of the ledger, they had a right to look for something to strike a balance, and with Buck Saunders loose on the range, they knew Rusty would be too busy to spend much time in reminiscence. Clothespin Mills was open in his admiration.

"Well, you little ol' son-of-a-gun," he said, grinning widely at the foreman. "That shorely was a right smart little mouthful."

Rusty started to protest, but a roper clapped him between the shoulders, and before he could get his breath back, they were rushing him down the street to the office of Grit's only justice of the peace, where the necessary legal formalities were complied with. This done, Johnnie Murray swung on the new sheriff of Grit.

"Now you piebald son of cactus parents," he said. "You been tellin' us for some time what 'brother Jim' would 'a' done with this here Buck Saunders person. Well —you got Buck Saunders all to your little self now. What's more, you ain't gonna be interfered with, not-at-all. Whenever you feels called on to uphold your family reputation while a few handsome cowpunchers looks on and sees how it's done, we ain't goin' to stop you. Speakin' for the community, some general, you needn't be over-particular about bringin' Buck with you, the which we ain't aimin' to run no hotel down at the jail. Likewise we'll be some tickled to death to come and look him over after you've done hip-shot him into hell-fire."

Rusty McGee polished Bill Doble's rusty old star on his sleeve and pinned it in position. He seemed oddly serious—for Rusty McGee. He walked to his horse without making reply. Only when he had his foot in the stirrup, did he throw back a response over his shoulder.

"Gents," he said, "I'm askin' you-all to remember one thing. That what you done for a joke I'm takin' dead serious!"

And leaving the thought to soak in, he jumped his animal and galloped off to the Double-O bunk-house to get his personal belongings.

THE grass was showing green on the grazing-lands around Vaca, a town four miles to the north of Grit, and the general headquarters for the sheepmen of the community, before things began to grow interesting for Rusty McGee in his new capacity as sheriff of Grit. The herders were happy, for an unusual Fall rain meant good prices for mutton in the early Spring, with plenty of Winter feed. As a result the ranch-owners were paying good money to their men, and the gambling-halls and saloons were running to a more than lucrative season.

"Lonesome Jack" Miller was one of the wealthiest of the upper foothill sheepmen. He was the owner of the Paseo Grande ranch, at the upper end of Smoot's Pass, and during the late months of each year would occasionally drop down to some of the desert towns for a three days' spree and "spend-fest." Vaca, whose reputation must have made Nero revolve in his grave for envy, was his favorite stamping-ground, especially if he had more than his usual belt of money to fling away.

It was his custom to pick out some particularly rabid dance-hall, where greasers, half-breeds and railroad "wops" were wont to congregate, and sit in on a poker game until the last of his ample bank-roll was gone. In this amusement, he was generally aided by most of the population of Vaca, whose personnel would have made an honest penitentiary blush for shame.

Lonesome Jack and Rusty McGee were bosom friends and pals. They had formerly worked in Arizona together, where Miller had saved McGee's life from a maddened steer during a late-year *rodeo*. Out of the episode had grown a friendship that had led Rusty, more than once, to cross the strip of sand to the pestilent little town, to help his former chum liven things up among the hated sheepmen by "tying a can on life." Whenever Miller had spent all that he brought down from the hills, barring enough for a supply of "sow-belly and aigs," it was always Rusty who put him on a horse and started him homeward bound.

On the night that Buck Saunders, the outlaw, made his famous display of hip-shooting de luxe, Rusty had left Lonesome Jack peaceably playing stud poker in the Hell-Abendin' bar, and had crossed to another equally disreputable place across the street with a couple of Double-O boys and a crowd from the Hashknife outfit who had been on after rustlers.

They had just about reached the fourth drink, when the sound of gun-play across the way brought them back on the run. They found Lonesome Jack Miller lying on the floor with two bullets in his stomach—dead. The others in the room were backed up against the bar in a state of panic—"a band of wall-eyed blatties at a fox party," as a Hashknife roper later described it.

Rusty McGee took three steps into the room. Then he stopped and his Colt six-gun came out.

"Who done it?" he snapped.

His voice grated, for Lonesome Jack was his friend.

"Buck Saunders!" A score of voices answered him as they crowded around.

From the proprietor of the place, Jim Bledsoe, Rusty McGee obtained the most coherent account of what had happened and it sustained all that the Grit contingent had heard about the outlaw's capacity as a killer.

"Lonesome Jack was settin' in on stud," said Bledsoe, "when this here Buck Saunson blows in and buys a stack. I don't reckon a man in the place had any sort o' notion who he was, for he sets in right cheerful—him with his back against the wall. Things was runnin' smooth when I heard some chairs scrape, the which in this town is fust cousin to gun-play. Thinks I, there's somethin' wrong!

"I takes a look. Here was this coyote and Lonesome Jack facin' each other over the table. Jack had his hand on his weapon like he was gosh-a'mighty ready to pull it. Buck was standin' up with his gun-hand danglin' loose with his fingers all spraddled out like they had candy on 'em. And I'm tellin' you gents, I been passin' forty-rod over the boards for fifteen years in some mighty tough places, but I ain't never seen nothin' like that *hombre's* face for double-barrelled, crocodile meanness. Right then I knowed without no further introduction he was doin' business with Buck Saunders. But says I to myself, for onct in his life, he done picked the wrong *hombre!*

"Jack leans over the table so's Buck'll get him good and he says: 'Yuh low-down, no-good, squint-eyed coyote'—just like that, kinda drawlin' the words out.

"I was lookin' right at Buck—me not reachin' for my old sawed-off seein' as how Jack was plenty ahead on the deal—and, so help me God—the only thing that maverick Buck done was to hitch his shoulders a couple of inches like a Frenchie sayin' 'I don't know.' The next minnit his Colt was spoutin' flame and destruction from both hands like a human volcano. He plugs twice and then braced the crowd for a comeback. But there wasn't none. Jack just kinda shuts his eyes like he was tired and wilted down on the floor. Buck gives the rest of the room the once-over and seein' none of us was hankerin' to act hostile after the gun-play we'd seen, he backs out and fades. We looks at Jack, but he was deader'n a flounder. He never got no chanct to pull his gun 'tall."

Rusty McGee stood silent at the conclusion of the narrative, wrapped in thought. Then he turned abruptly and started for the door. The boys from the two ranches made to follow him, but he held up his hand.

"Nothin' doin', *hombres*," he said. "I'm playin' a lone hand in this game. There's been some palaver about me roundin' up this Buck person, the which ain't altogether appealed to my sense o' humor. Under the circumstances I'm not needin' any help. If I ain't back in a week you can ride out and get us both!"

Rusty swung quickly into his saddle and lashed his horse into top-speed, swinging toward the Llano Placido, leaving the punchers and sheepmen open-mouthed with astonishment.

"Well, the little red-headed runt!" exploded Red-eye Weeks. "Ain't he the stuck-up kid, though? Want any help? 'No, kind sir,' says he. 'I'm rollin' this little hill myself. I ain't no common cow-punch no more. Me—I'm the sheriff!'"

And Johnnie Murray shook his head.

"No," he said. "You got Rusty dead wrong, Red-eye. He's hell-bent for action this time. We done kidded him too much. Besides, Jack was his pal and he's double sore, with all the mean on top. Bein' Irish, he pulls a heady play and acts plumb foolish. He didn't want us to figger he was afraid to go up ag'in' Buck single-handed, the which he ain't. But the blamed little fire-and-tow fool will ride up on that killin' houn' head down and Buck'll shoot the tripe outen him for practise. ——! Why was fools made, anyhow?"

The picture drawn by the big cattleman struck the punchers as significant, for their knowledge of the outlaw's tricks supplied only too vividly the details that Johnnie Murray omitted. But what to do? There was little or no use in going after him, for a posse would only increase his danger of discovery now and double Buck's guard.

"He's shore goin' up against the scurviest maverick on the range for fair," declared "Windy" Smith, one of the Hashknife ropers. "I plumb hate to see that little show-barker called thataway."

"Yeah, and there's a ring 'round the moon, too," chimed in another, "and that means more rain and a washed trail."

The boys stared at each other glumly. A man-hunt through the sagebrush flats, along the crumbling edge of buttes and over slippery clay patches, where a horse can get no foothold with all its instinctive skill, was bad enough under the best conditions. But with all marks of previous travel washed out, with hands blue from the cold of the soaking mountain mist, saddle leather creaking from the wet, and a listening, human viper lying somewhere out in the night with the nose of a rifle trained over a sheltering rock—this was no sinecure. The boys missed none of it as they visualized the situation to themselves.

"Let's trail the red-headed ijit," snapped Johnnie Murray suddenly, wheeling on the others. "It's like this. Rusty ain't no child and he ain't goin' to walk into no suicide club. Besides, bein' Irish, he'll get over his peeve, meanin' principally us, before he's pounded out ten miles of sand, and this here aggregation of gents bein' some loaded for cattle-rustlers, might be considered reasonable fine backin' before this thing's over. What say?"

THE idea was received with enthusiasm. An hour later, well armed and with fresh mounts, a grim band of cow-punchers loped easily off across the Llano Placido toward the foot of Bone Mountain. Johnnie Murray insisted on taking Injun Joe, the half-breed, professional trailer, along. Red-eye Weeks had been selected for the job of interpreter, being the only one in the party who could understand the half-breed's gibberish. With hardly a word spoken between them, the self-constituted posse steadily loped along, covering many miles of ground before midnight.

The prophecy of the ring around the moon was sustained, when, shortly after that hour, the mist that had settled around them thickened into a drizzle. For two hours the horses, their bodies steaming and lathering, splashed ahead through the mud and rain. Finally Red-eye Weeks, who had been riding in front with the trailer, called a halt.

"This here eddicated product in the flapjack pants," he announced, "says he's lost the trail."

Johnnie Murray exploded.

"——!" he exclaimed. "I could 'a' done that good, myself. Ask him what he thinks we brought him along for."

Red-eye exchanged several grunts with the Indian, who was by this time off his animal, feeling around in the mud. After a few minutes the "product" waved his arms above his head.

"No use," growled Red-eye, "he says 'big-water' done washed everything out and he's lost."

"Can't he sniff 'round or somethin'?" demanded the Hashknife foreman. "For the love of Pete, what's the use of bein' an Injun if you're goin' to fall down like this?"

"Say!" shouted Red-eye, in exasperation. "You talk to him, will you? You make me sick."

"Well, he makes me sick," retorted Johnnie Murray in deep disgust. "I got a blind sheepdog that can't smell that would 've done a blamed sight better."

Red-eye tried a few more scraps of scrambled English and Indian with the trailer, but all to no purpose, so the posse finally gave it up and took stock of their location as best they could without a light. After some circling they finally located some scrub cottonwood, under which they huddled with dripping ponchos until the first breaking of the dawn disclosed their position in a small arroyo which opened into Nuevo Cut. Beyond, lay Perdito Valley, objective of the ride.

As they swung their stiffened limbs to saddle, Windy Smith noticed the Indian sound asleep with his back against a tree. He stirred him up with his toe.

"Wake up, ol' blubberin' Choctaw," he said. "The trail's done come home to roost whilst you was sawin' wood."

The Indian jumped to his feet, got his bearings and shook his head. Then he unburdened himself of a few guttural remarks to Red-eye Weeks, hopped his bare-backed cow-pony and clattered off down the arroyo in the direction they had come..

"What's happened to little Weak-in-the-Head?" asked Johnnie Murray, staring after him.

"He says," chuckled Red-eye, "as how he's goin' no further with a *loquero* because cow-puncher always was plumb foolish anyhow, and besides he's wet and he wants to go back to his squaw and get something hot to drink."

The boys broke into a laugh that seemed to wipe out the incipient grouch that everybody wore. Johnnie Murray cinched his saddle-leather another hole and looked off toward the end of the valley. Ahead loomed Big Eye Butte, a huge granite jut that stood out like a ruined pyramid with a great top overlooking the flatlands beneath. Somewhere at the base of that great pile was the rendezvous of Buck Saunders, for whose capture, dead or alive, Rusty McGee was taking his life in his hands. The thought acted as a stimulant.

"Reckon we'll be movin' on," he said softly, and flipped his horse into action with the end of his riata.

Single file, the little cavalcade wound up through the cut, across the upper end of the valley toward the base of the mountain. As they topped the rise that led down into the floor of Big Butte Valley, Murray suddenly threw up his arm. Every rider in the party immediately sat his horse back on its haunches. Following the foreman's outstretched finger, they made out a speck crawling up the side of Big Eye Butte just across the cañon from Bone Mountain, so near the ridge as to be outlined almost in silhouette.

"Rusty McGee!" cried one of the party.

The foreman shook his head.

"Take another look," he said. His head was thrown back and his hat was pulled low on his nose as he scrutinized the moving speck through half-closed lids. Suddenly he slapped his leg and gave a shout of excitement.

"I knowed it, I knowed it!" he exclaimed. "I knowed there was something familiar about that ridin'. There ain't but one man in this whole blamed county that can ride a hoss up the side of Big Eye Butte thataway and not have to pick a trail."

The boys crowded closer.

"By Crickey, it's old Bill Doble!" they shouted almost in unison with an exclamation from Red-eye Weeks.

There could be no mistake once the likeness was placed, for Bill had his own way of sitting a horse.

"He sure ain't headin' for the top of Big Eye, is he?" queried Windy Smith, leaning forward.

"Not him," replied Johnnie Murray. "He's headin' for Bone Mountain. This here is a short-cut along the side. Anybody hidin' on the top of Bone couldn't see him comin' thisaway, while t'other way Bill would be ridin' in the open."

"Wise Bill," commented Red-eye in admiration. "He shore is one clever ol' coot!"

Presently as they watched, the speck crossed the skyline of the Butte and vanished over the edge on to the plateau beyond, thence to reappear again a moment later on the slight depression that dipped to the greater slant of Bone Mountain. Johnnie Murray galvanized into sudden action.

"Fellows," he said. "Bill ain't ridin' like that for his health. Likewise, Bone Mountain ain't such a bad place the which to take a squint over the country for Rusty. I reckon we'll just take a little *pasear* up there and see what's goin' on. How?"

The effect of his words was electrical. A pack of astonished horses were suddenly roweled into life and the next instant the cowboys were tearing across the open space with the Hashknife foreman in the lead. It took them just two hours to make the top of the mountain—such was the condition of the country through which they rode—taking the same trail followed by Bill Doble on his big bay mare. When they finally swept out on the level plateau, as flat as a table-top, they gave one look across the surface and fell to swearing with all the fluency with which a puncher is gifted. From edge to edge of the mile-square rectangle, there was not a sign of life!

The cowboys gave their horses a chance to breathe, and then, impatiently, they cantered across the level space toward the far edge. There, on the very rim—weary, dusty, their nerves and patience worn to a raveling—they clustered in a compact knot and peered over the edge, to find, with unexpected suddenness, spread out nearly a thousand feet below, in the natural amphitheater of the Taza Caliente, a drama that would have thrilled a movie producer to the soul.

THE Taza Caliente, as the name indicates, is the "hot bowl" of an extinct volcano. It is nothing more than a huge pit, resembling a natural arena, spooned out of the hills by some igneous action of prehistoric days. The floor of the bowl is perhaps an eighth of a mile in diameter, stippled with huge gray boulders and blocks of once molten rock. In the center a score of tiny geysers or hot springs of sulfurous waters, bubble out, draining through a narrow crack in the bowl, which extends off toward the south. The sides are pitted with caverns and grottos until the ensemble looks, as Windy Smith expressed it, "like the entrance to hell with the gate left open."

There, lying on the floor on the Taza Caliente, comfortably braced against a boulder which sheltered him from the heat, was Buck Saunders. His rifle was resting in his arm, conveniently located for rapid use. His horse was nowhere to be seen and the boys inferred, rightly, that it was hobbled in one of the near-by caverns. On one side of the outlaw was a hot spring, bubbling and simmering in the heat. On the other was a hole of quicksand, deadly and treacherous. The only path by which he could be reached was over the huge boulder toward which his rifle was pointing.

Some two hundred feet away from the outlaw, tucked behind another rock of jagged formation was Sheriff Rusty McGee. But what a Rusty! His hat was gone. His shirt was torn half-off so that the skin showed through in patches of white. From head to foot he was plastered with dried adobe. His face was grimed and bloody, where he had fought his way through innumerable acres of matted underbrush. All these details the boys got later, for, standing on the edge of the overhanging butte, all they saw at that height was the figure of the red-headed sheriff worming along the limestone bottom on his stomach toward the unsuspicious Buck Saunders.

"Gosh A'mighty," ejaculated Windy Smith. "The little red-head is goin' to get his man sure."

He slapped his leg in excitement.

"'Less Buck hears him comin'," commented Red-eye Weeks skeptically.

Johnnie Murray gave the speaker a malignant glance. Then he whipped his rifle from its saddle scabbard and slid to the ground. There came the sound of a shell sliding into the discharge chamber—and then Johnnie Murray cursing softly.

"Damnation," he muttered, squinting along the sights. "I can't make him."

Heat waves dancing up out of the bowl

disconcerted the aim and made a steady bead impossible.

"——, you couldn't hit a fat man settin' still," declared one of the Hashknife outfit, in disgust.

"Let's go down the slant and get in on the finish," suggested another.

"No use," said the foreman. "It'll be all over before we get there.

Buck was smoking a cigaret. They could see little puffs of smoke sail up into the air and disappear. Rusty was crawling toward him, dragging his rifle in the warm mud. The boys packed together in a tense group, their eyes taking in every movement.

"God!" exclaimed Johnnie Murray. "This here is gettin' on my nerves. Why don't they start shootin'?"

Rusty kept up his crawling until only the rock separated him from the outlaw. Leaving his rifle on the ground, he drew his revolver, a puncher's invariable weapon for close work, and edged along on his elbows. It was apparent to the watchers on the rim of the bowl above that he had an exact idea of where Buck Saunders was located. It was also equally apparent that the outlaw did not know that a soul was within miles of him.

Buck finished the cigaret he was smoking and flipped the stub into the hot spring. Then he stood up, shook the sand from his clothes and picked up his rifle. It was at that instant that Sheriff Rusty McGee laid one hand on a shelf of rock that projected from the big boulder and, in two lightning bounds, vaulted to the top. Buck whirled at the sound and swung his rifle under his armpit with one motion. Together the two weapons shattered the silences of the steaming caldron.

Rusty McGee's hat sailed across the area with a bullet-hole through the crown. The outlaw's weapon described a parabolic curve in mid-air and sank in the quicksand pit.

The exchange left Rusty in command of the situation. He slid down the face of the rock until he fronted the outlaw on the level. Buck's back was half-turned. He stood rubbing his left arm, which had been jarred numb by the impact of the heavy revolver bullet on his rifle stock. Rusty appeared to be talking, his weapon at the outlaw's middle. They could see him gesticulate with his free hand. Once he pointed off toward Vaca, as though he was referring to the murder of Lonesome Jack Miller. Of a sudden, he reached for his handcuffs.

As the steel bands glittered for an instant in the sunlight, there came a quick spurt of flame from under the outlaw's arm. Instantly McGee's weapon coughed back—a single flash. The sounds came up to the tense little group of watchers with a hollow *plop-plop* that was taken up by the walls of the bowl and echoed and reechoed in diminuendo. For the barest fraction of a second, the two men stood motionless, as though each was awaiting the next move of the other. Then Rusty McGee curled forward on his face, his fingers plucking at the warm sand beneath him.

"Oh, my God! He's got him!" moaned Johnnie Murray.

His voice sounded high and cracked like an old man's. The rest caught the rasp of his rifle hammer as he dropped on one knee to steady his aim. Before he could fire, the drama, that had become in the twinkling of an eye a grim tragedy, was interrupted.

Buck was in the act of dropping his still smoking weapon back into its holster when his attention was caught by a movement high up on the side of the bowl. The boys of the posse, clustered on the rim, above caught it at the same time. There, in plain sight, about three hundred feet from where Rusty McGee lay, a silent figure on the ground, stood the one man everybody in that part of the country had forgotten—old Bill Doble.

The former sheriff was mud from head to foot. His hat was pulled low over his eyes to shut out the glare of the sun. From beneath the rim, his white hair stuck out in a matted fringe. Slung over his shoulder, English fashion, was a belt of cartridges that glistened in the sun. In one hand he balanced his old-fashioned Colt six-gun—the one with the notches on the handle. Clearly exposed to the outlaw's fire and within easy range, he made no pretense of seeking cover as Buck Saunders swung on him.

The outlaw had just time to register the picture when he went into action with both hands. Straight from the hip he fired, again and again, the bullets throwing up little flecks of dust around Bill Doble's feet. The shots rippled together like the *ha-ha-ha* of a machine-gun, as he sprayed a deadly hail of lead up the hillside toward his enemy.

Four—six times he shot while the white-haired figure before him stood motionless.

And then—with all the calm deliberation of a man shooting down clay pipes in a gallery, Bill Doble raised his old-fashioned six-gun with its wickedly long barrel in a hand as steady as the rocks that surrounded him, and with perfect precision, shot Buck Saunders neatly between his eyes.

The group on the rim of the bowl above watched the bad man flounder in the sand and then lie still. The wreath of smoke from Bill Doble's weapon hung idly in the air for a moment and dissipated. After a bit, he threw out the empty shell and began to feel in his pockets for a jack-knife. The action broke the tension. The eyes of the little group met.

"Reckon we might as well go down and get Rusty," said Johnnie Murray.

His voice was unsteady, and his hand, as he dropped his rifle back in the saddle scabbard was shaking.

GRIT was just shutting up for the night when a cavalcade of horsemen trotted down the main street with old Bill Doble in the lead with the dead body of Buck Saunders swung over the pommel of his saddle and Rusty McGee swaying dizzily in his stirrups. The whole town turned out to hear the details, crowding into the sheriff's office while the dead bandit was spread out on the floor and a physician bandaged up a bullet crease in Rusty's skull. The story was told with much embellishment and illustration, while everybody shook old Bill by the hand and whacked him on the back in bursts of jubilation.

After a bit, McGee began to show signs of speech. He motioned to Red-eye Weeks.

"Where's the judge?" he asked weakly.

"Reckon he's over at La Farge's," said the other.

"Get him here, *pronto*," ordered Rusty.

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out the handcuffs he had never had a chance to use. Then he unfastened the star from his shirt. These and a bunch of keys he shoved into Bill Doble's hands.

"Gents," said Rusty, "as the last official act, the which I'm goin' to perform as sheriff, I want to pick my successor—the same bein' the former sheriff of this here community, Bill Doble! And if there's any *hombre* what wants the privilege of sleepin' alongside of Buck yonder, let him say different.

"Me—I'm through. I got enough. Houndin' after coyotes like this here animile, trailin' through the rain, wallowin' in mud, feelin' 'round a hot spring and gettin' all cooked up like an egg, and then gettin' plugged in the head, ain't my idea of a good time, howsomever it might tickle Bill Doble most to death. Give me a leg-nippin' cayuse or a loco longhorn to wrastle any day in the week and all the time. I'm goin' back to punchin' cattle. They're human!"

Old Bill Doble looked at the handcuffs and the keys and the star which Rusty had thrust into his hand. Then he laid them down on the desk and started for the door. A dozen hands brought him back, hands used to "flopping" steers for a pastime. It was at this juncture that Judge Smalley, Grit's justice of the peace, who had sworn Rusty McGee into office, appeared suddenly in the doorway, propelled violently from the rear by Red-eye Weeks. The judge's hair was disheveled, his eyes inflamed and his hands shaking from one of his periodic encounters with Black La Farge's "Best Snake" whisky. Indignation over his enforced method of travel showed in his face. But he was also distinctly worried about something.

"Step up, old Fire-Tongs," greeted Rusty McGee, "and view the or'nariest carcass that ever flopped to the glory of Grit. When you've got an eye-full you-all untie that distinction you done hog-tied on me, the same bein' too onhandy for my temp'rament, and belongin' by rights to the killer of that hip-shootin' devil on the floor."

Judge Smalley peered at the recumbent and late Mr. Buck Saunders, bad man. Then a flicker of comprehension showed in his eyes.

"Thash a' ri'," he said. "No sher'mony nesh'ary. Thash whash been worryin' me."

He nodded his head with an expression of relief.

"What do you mean, no ceremony necessary?"

"'Zactly what I shay," said the Judge. "Rushty couldn't reshign f'm offish 'cause he never wash sher'ff. 'Shnot legal make sher'ffs th' way I made 'em. I got all mixed up. Looked it up in book afterward. Zhash wha' I did. Bill sher'ff all time."

"You mean—all that swearin' in of Rusty you did weren't no way leg[illegible]?" Johnnie Murray's tone was incredulous.

"Zhash ri'," chuckled Judge Smalley tipsily. "I was all mixed up—terr'ble mixed up. Ol' Bill, good ol' Bill! Always was sher'ff."

The crowd broke into a storm of laughter and cheers. Old Bill Doble blew his nose violently and spat on the stove. Rusty McGee took the star out of his hand and pinned it on Bill's shirt—back in the same old holes where he had worn it before. Then he grinned under his bandage.

"Say, Bill," he said. "Tell me somethin', will you? How came this maverick didn't wing you when he was doin' all that fancy hip-shootin'? I got a mild curiosity for information, now it's all over. He was hell's lightnin' on the trigger, that Buck was, and faster'n scat on the draw. And yet, by Jinks——"

He left the sentence unfinished.

Sheriff Bill Doble cleared his throat and spat again on the stove.

"Son," he said, "I done learned a lot of things in my time. But one thing I learned powerful strong—that a hip-shooter and a mule is consid'rable alike. Close up, they is hell. But git off a ways and there ain't neither of 'em can hit nothin'. Consequent, when I does business with one or t'other of 'em, I does it from a distance and takes my time."

Rusty McGee glanced down at the outlaw, once terror of the Mojave, "spread-eagled" on the floor with a bullet-hole through the center of his forehead.

"I reckon ye're right, Bill," he said, facing the wide smiles around him. "I shore reckon ye're right. And I guess I done learned a few things myself, only I learned 'em some recent. One of 'em is, that it ain't any kind of shootin' that makes a sheriff. It's just plumb natural hoss sense, the which is powerful oncommon."

He reached up and caressed the bandage on his head.

Johnnie Murray had his golden opportunity and he took it.

"You ain't goin' back on yore brother Jim up in Canada, are you, Rusty?" he asked maliciously.

The red-headed roper threw him a baleful glance. Then he dropped into a near-by chair and buried his aching head in his hands.

"——!" he said. "You never could believe a word Jim said. He always was a —— liar!"

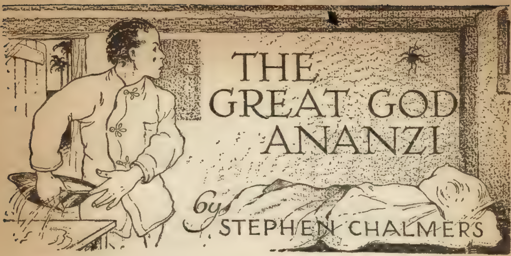
# SWORDFISHIN'

### *by* WARREN ELLIOT CARLETON

IF A swordfish whirls when you heave the harpoon,
  And churns the green water white in his wake,
Then say a quick prayer and sing a hymn-tune
  And take the last breath that you ever will take.

He'll come for you like a torpedo let loose;
You can row for dear life, but it won't be no use.
He won't give you time to get out of his track,
But he'll stave in your dory; then turn and charge back.
He can handle his sword like a lancer his lance,
So with you in the water, you won't have a chance.

Then make up your mind that your time's comin' soon
If a swordfish whirls when you heave the harpoon!



# THE GREAT GOD ANANZI

### By STEPHEN CHALMERS

*Author of "The Admiral of the Line," "Chaplain to the Buccaneers," etc.*

THE anvil-chorus of the *kling-kling* birds in the coconut palms over Sam Chung's rum-shop awoke Warden, the American visitor. What stirred the Anglo-Jamaican in his cot on the other side of the room was the whack of the American's shoe hitting that spot on the wall where a huge spider had been a second before.

Through sleepy eyes Hambridge, the sun-scorched man with the faded blue eyes and fair hair, amusedly observed his guest's apprehension over the fact that the spider had mysteriously reappeared right above the American's bed. Warden, pajamaed and slipperless, shot from his cot and armed himself with the tin wash-basin—loaded.

"Can the brute swim?" he asked, perceiving that Hambridge was awake.

"That spider," said the Anglo-Jamaican banana-man with a yawn and a drawl that had creole languor in it; "that spider, *buccra*, can do anything. It can turn itself into a man or any other sort of beast. It can vanish and reappear somewhere else at will. It's the Br'er Fox of West Indian lore. It's name is 'Nancy' and it's harmless, so far as its bite goes. In darkest Africa it was the great god Ananzi—god of cunning—and it's the most infernal bad luck to kill one. Now, how about cawfee?"

"Mean to tell me that lump of hair and legs isn't poisonous? Wow! It's as big as my fist with the fingers spread!"

"He's also the god of beneficence," said Hambridge solemnly, "if you believe in him. If you don't—ask any roadside Quashie how buzzards came by their bald heads."

The overseer chuckled but suddenly turned his head toward the jalousied door leading to the native outhouses. His voice arose in the broad dialect:

"A weh dat gyal, Habigail? Dis *buccra* not gwine hab cawfee dis fine marnin'?"

"Ah comin' ri' dis minnit, *busha* (overseer)!" sing-songed a voice from the outhouse kitchen.

"Mek it soon-soon den, for dis Banana Day—yah?" urged the *busha*.

Warden still eyed the motionless spider on the wall above his cot. He would rather have dispelled his doubts by slaughter, for he was not superstitious. Yet who was he to cast doubt upon the mystic beliefs of darkest Africa, especially when his Anglo-Jamaican host shared them.

"I suppose if I lammed the brute," said Warden humorously, "and Pereira got ahead of you today by a single banana bunch, you'd boot me out of Rio Hacha."

"N-no," said Hambridge, rising lazily, "but if my runners heard you'd killed a Nancy before breakfast they'd chuck the fight before it was started. Ho, gyal! Weh dat cawfee?"

"Comin', *busha!*"

The jalousied door swung open and a beaming mulatto girl entered with a bent tray bearing two tin cups of steaming Blue Mountain, flanked by a couple of star-apples and some bread buttered with canned bluenose.

"Marnin', *busha*" said the girl with a white-toothed grin.

To the visitor she accorded less genial deference. Without the grin she bowed to Warden and said—

"Marnin,' *buccra*."

That any fight was in the air Nature at least denied. Outside the rough shack which was the port's headquarters of the Caribbean Fruit Company, Rio Hacha lay like a dead Spanish ruin before being resurrected by the promise of new day.

It was a semi-circle of crumbling, slave-built houses on one side of a white sand road that curved inward between two horns of volcanic rock goring out to sea. On the eastern horn, under the coconut palms where the *kling-kling* birds clamored their anvil-chorus, Sam Chung, the heathen, let down the bars of his saltfish, *quattie* bread and rum store in preparation for the great business of the week—Banana Day. On the other horn, Pereira, the Portuguese creole, emerged from the shack which was his abode and Rio Hacha headquarters of the banana trust, the Amalgamated, and scanned the field of prospective battle with his small, soft eyes.

There was no promise of conflict either in him or the scene. The world was tinged with rose. The sun's rim was not up over the edge of the still, oily Caribbean. The sea-breeze was not due for an hour, and the noon roar of the surf on the reef was but as yet a mere sigh.

Between the horns, on the inner side of the incurving sand road, Rio Hacha still slept. It would sleep late this morning, for the day would properly begin at noon and last through the ensuing night. About midday the place would wake up when Pereira took his station at the buying wharf of the Amalgamated Banana Company, when his rival, Hambridge of the Caribbean, occupied his overseer's bench at the independents' pier, and when the runners of the two companies began to squabble over the incoming drays, carts, donkeys and black humanity laden with banana bunches from the plantations and the native patches.

As the Banana Day progressed the fight would grow more bitter as price and demand soared or declined as the required fruit fell short or otherwise. The steamers of the rival lines would appear, racing neck and neck, perhaps, for the mouth of the bottle-shaped lagoon. Then would begin the loading, and when the last whaleboat was emptied of its green-gold treasure the race would be resumed for the market-ports of Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston. Then Rio Hacha, like many another port, would fall asleep again for another week.

BUT at that early hour there was no hint of the banana war, another battle of which was presently to be waged; the war which had been growing in heat for weeks between the banana trust and the independents who sought a place in the sun where the tiger defied all comers.

For a year the Amalgamated Banana Company had been making a point to put the Caribbean Fruit Company out of business. To defeat this—at Rio Hacha at least—the independents had sent Hambridge to that fruitful port to match his brains against a pastmaster of banana-running—José Pereira of the trust forces. Hambridge, with a white man's mental energy, plus native birth and understanding, had made good in all branches of the business, from selecting and clearing ground to reaping a crop of "straights."

Pereira, wily behind his sleek, sleepy exterior, looked as harmless a West Indian as ever lost energy by climate and slack morals. He was unhealthily fat. His smooth, swarthy cheeks trickled humidity on all occasions. His silk shirt—he had a weakness for unwashable silk—clung to his perspiring girth like a clammy balloon.

He also wore sandals, strained crash pants and a broad felt hat which it was said he bought by width—it looked like a limp parasol. And he had a fondness for a sprinkling of dried lavender sprigs in his tobacco. When the breeze wafted a whiff of lavender from the west Hambridge was wont to become profanely energetic.

Pereira, having smelled the air and scanned the eastern horizon where the steamers would appear on the race from port to port, retired to morning coffee and buttered roast plantain.

Hambridge and his guest, Warden, having disposed of Blue Mountain and bluenose, strolled in their pajamas to the Rio Hacha for the morning swim. Usually they took the guns along, or Mitch-Chell, the *busha's* black henchman, brought the rods and live shrimps for tarpon, but—this was Banana Day.

Some power in the North who had thought not beyond his desk, or possibly was trying an experiment on public opinion, had proposed a tax on bananas. That the people howled mattered little to the banana-men at banana sources. It was all right about "the poor man's luxury" so long as the poor man bought.

At present the poor man's agents—the middlemen up North—were buying on his behalf, the other half for themselves. The dealers were stocking their refrigerators with green fruit to be ripened by raising the temperature in sympathy with the ante.

Already the price per bunch, as yet the same to the poor man who bought "fingers," "hands" at most, from the corner grocer, was soaring among the banana islands. Future bunches "fitting" on the trees were being snapped up by contract and for fancy prices. Before the tax proposal the business had been at unusually low ebb, "straights" down to thirty-five cents on the tropic wharves, seven-handed bunches down to eighteen cents, "sixes" rejected altogether as not worth their stem weight and returned with all smaller bunches for Quashie's family pot and pig-feed.

But since the tax proposal prices had moved steadily upward. The first week the Rio Hacha quotations of both the Amalgamated and the Caribbean companies fluctuated from fifty cents to fifty-five, with a tot of rum for the donkey-man who brought in not less than four "straight" bunches. The second week, while "Constant Reader" and "Pro Bono" discussed the tax up North, the islands' price went up to sixty-five and seventy cents per "straight" with frequent fist-fights between the runners of Pereira and Hambridge.

In one such fight a scared jackass, laden with five eleven-handed bunches—extra "straights"—fled with its coveted load and committed inadvertent suicide in the Rio Hacha. And once Hambridge, irritated by lavender floating down from westward, called Pereira a *soor kaboocha*, which Pereira, ignorant of Hindustani, but suspicious, resented.

The third week Hambridge's chief henchman, Mitch-Chell, smote the Amalgamated's chief runner in the eye, Pereira's man had called him a "t'iefin' porpus," which is not Hindustani but has to do with the questionable honesty of a person who has once been in a home for paupers. Both were arrested, but promptly released. The police force owed both Hambridge and Pereira since the last poker game—a love-feast which occurred on the evening following each Banana Day, when the nights again grew lonesome.

Now it was the dawn of the fourth Banana Day since the tax proposal. In his hip pocket Pereira had a written slip brought in the night by a black boy on a mule. It was from the Amalgamated's boss at Port Antonio. It tersely stated his instructions:

> Rio Hacha: Fifteen thousand bunches—sixes up. Average seventy-five cents—dollar limit. Steamer *Haciendado* arrive 4 P.M. to clear at midnight.

At the Caribbean's shack Hambridge had a message from the independents' chief, whose headquarters were at Port Maria. The chief happened to be Warden's father. His son, fresh from an American college, was in Jamaica to observe Ananzi spiders, the native and other animals, and to learn the difference between Para and Guinea grass, white yams and *afu*, and particularly the difference between a banana and a plantain. The *busha* was expert in these matters.

Warden Sr.'s message of instruction was less formal:

> Buy all you can lay hands on and keep out of jail. Go Pereira's limit and then some. Tax on bananas taxing demand. If we don't get the trimmings the Amalgamated will. Show the rah-rah boy something.

This message Hambridge studied again after the swim, when he and the rah-rah boy had returned to the shack. It was a perfectly clear message. There was nothing about it that should have brought a moody frown to the *busha's* sun-scorched brow. He studied it, turned it over, and even held it up to the light. Once when the Amalgamated had been waylaying the Caribbean's dispatch bearers, the *busha* himself had written an important message with banana-juice, which remained invisible until it had been laundered with a hot flatiron.

But this message from Warden Sr. was all on the surface. It was just as Hambridge had expected the wording would be. Yet he was troubled. He did not know himself why or what about. He had had the same vague feeling that time he put his money on a sure favorite in the Overseers'

Sweepstakes and lost a month's pay, a saddle and faith in his own perspicacity. His abstracted reverie was disturbed by Warden Jr.

"But how can you tell it isn't a tarantula?" he asked.

The Ananzi was still on the wall.

"You can tell shortly after it bites," said the banana-man irritably. "The banana bunches are full of them and I never knew one bite except in the New York papers."

He rose and went to the jalousied door.

"Mitch-Chell!" he roared. "Go bring come a gallon a rum—yah?"

"*Eu-eu, busha*," assented a guttural from without.

"An' tell he no sen' dis *buccra* parafeen all color up wi' annotta like las' week," said Hambridge. "Jamaica man no fool 'bout good rum."

"As bad as all that?" said Warden when Mitch-Chell had departed Chungward.

"A nigger out of the bush will fall for a three-farthings' of rum where he'll turn down a threepence extra on the bunch," the *busha* growled.

He went into the cubbyhole which was his office. Presently his runners, ragged, bare-footed, black and shiny as wet ebony, gathered around him for a war council over a sheet of names.

With a pencil the *busha* checked off this man of the hills and who were expected to bring in fruit before nightfall. This man was no good—Pereira's body and soul—Pereira had loaned him money. This fellow was doubtful, but Mitch-Chell was at his brother's wake, wasn't he? Mitch-Chell must take care of him. Pereira had been angling for this other fellow—a regular six-straight-bunch man. Give him a drink first, then talk him up!

And so on. Pereira on the western horn was holding a similar war council with his native runners, the chiefest of whom had a bruised eye.

Warden had taken a gun, after one more respectful glance at the great god Ananzi on the wall, and gone off to the Hacha swamp to pot baldpates on the rise to the hog-plum feeding in the hills.

WHEN the American visitor returned to Rio Hacha it was past noon. His steps had taken him over into the Bengal plantation where he had become interested in the barracks of the indentured coolie laborers and a beautiful but brainless creature of no caste whatever who looked like Oriental romance under the sounding name of Latchimi.

But he forgot about his Hindi flower—who had been married when she was nine, although he did not know it—when he tried to recognize Rio Hacha. The settlement which at morn had seemed as dead as the Spaniards who built it under Don Sasi, was now alive with Jamaican clamor and American hustle.

The wharves of the rival companies were scenes of activity. On the piers half-clad negroes were piling bunches of green-gold fruit, at each pile a mulatto clerk in an immense hat checking the bunches as they were passed into a whaleboat by perspiring handlers.

In the doorway of the Caribbean's wharf-building Hambridge sat under a huge pith helmet watching the battle which was going on directly before him on the sand road. Down at the Amalgamated's wharf, where the Portuguese sat complacently breathing lavender, there was, on the other hand, comparative order.

The main road from the hills entered Rio Hacha from the east, and the incoming fruit-carriers ran the rivals' gantlet at the Caribbean's wharf. Once past that point it was agreed that the spoils were to Pereira. But that worthy's runners were on the job with Hambridge's at the danger point. Both sides yelled, cursed, cajoled, threatened and tried to bribe the dazed Quashie from the interior, who had arrived with his humble donkey and his banana patch's yield of "fit" bunches for the week.

Clashes between the rival runners, between the banana-sellers and the over-zealous banana-buyers, were so frequent that one continuous fight was in progress. The moment one was settled and peace established, generous libations at Sam Chung's rum-counter led to renewed recriminations.

When Warden arrived on the scene he witnessed a typical collision. A well-to-do native planter had arrived with twenty "straight" bunches in a small dray dragged by an unhappy mule that was half-suspended between the shafts. The negro was a newcomer to Rio Hacha, drawn thereto by the promise of high prices.

Unused to Rio Hacha methods he flayed

the belligerent runners with his cowhide whip. Failing to dislodge them from the top of his dray he turned his lash upon the mule, urging it out of this pandemonium. Knowing that if the dray once passed the Caribbean's wharf the fruit was lost to Pereira, Hambridge's runners seized the animal's head. Pereira's runners tried to dislodge them. The proprietor raised his arms to heaven and called upon his Maker to bear witness that he was a Baptist in good standing and had never backslid or been in the poorhouse—whatever these virtues had to do with the case.

Then the mule took a part in the affair—resentfully. It let loose with its hind legs. The traces broke; a shaft cracked. Two minutes later Pereira got the mule and sections of harness. Hambridge's men battled in the dust with the rival runners for possession of the fruit. That which survived undamaged presumably found its way to Baltimore by the Caribbean's steamer.

The man from the hills went back to his yam-patch and his dusky bride with a smashed dray, a penitent mule in mended harness, the price of nine good bunches mostly in his head, the rest being in Sam Chung's till, five "rejects" and the remains of six mutilated banana stems. But then he had learned much.

Hambridge observed all this without once rising from his bench or removing the pipe from his mouth. Occasionally he wrote an order and had it passed to Mitch-Chell. It usually was a command to give some prospective banana-seller a la-a-arge drink of rum.

"How goes the battle, General?" asked Warden, coming to the *busha's* side.

"Good enough," said Hambridge, rather gloomily. "We hold our own. He's ahead of us on his contracted fruit, of course, and he's turned a lousy trick or two. But the day's young."

He spoke with a kind of abstraction, a certain doubt. Warden thought the overseer did not look quite himself—a touch of fever perhaps. He advised a personal application of the bribe-bottle as a stimulant to zest.

"I don't as a rule," said the *busha* thoughtfully, "but I may before I'm through."

The afternoon lengthened and swift dusk came. Into Rio Hacha trundled more donkeys, drays and natives burdened with bananas. Many lights appeared on land and sea and the tropic heavens lit their million candles. The fireflies danced among the coconut palms and the low logwood greenery.

In the semi-darkness the broad negro voices, hilarious with rum or furious with rage, and the constant squealing and braying of mules and donkeys contrasted oddly with the mirroring sea from which the day-breeze had fled. Against the dense blue of the evening sky the palms rose as stenciled things in mid-air. The *kling-kling* birds, returning in pairs to the palm-crests, again beat out their anvil chorus, but not with the unanimous gusts of dawn.

Already the rival steamers had appeared, the Caribbean's *Amato* first because it had gained time through failure to get its quota at the other ports along the coast. The Amalgamated's *Haciendado* was now in the lagoon, too. Her gun-ports were wide open and the trust's handlers were passing in thousands of bunches of bananas. From the wharf at the western end of the bay Pereira's loaders could be heard numbering the bunches for the checker in a sing-song with doggerel rhymings:

Bana-a-ana—four!
Come gimme one mo-ore—O!

Bana-a-ana—fi-ive!
Ho, boy, look ali-ive—O!

The *Amato* had not begun to load. The first whaleboat had just left the Caribbean's wharf and it would be some time before Hambridge could keep the passers as busy as the stevedores desired to be. Things were going badly.

Earlier in the afternoon he had received another dispatch from Warden Sr. at Port Maria.

> Amalgamated cleaning up everything all along. *Amato* not half laden! It's up to you!

It was up to him. Yet what could he do to save the company from sending a half-laden steamer North, for ordinarily she cleared from Rio Hacha? And go she must with her perishable cargo ripening in her holds. But even if he captured every bunch that came into Rio Hacha, even if he stole fruit regularly contracted to Pereira, even if he assassinated the fat, lavender-soaked sponge and lifted his deliveries from the piled wharf, still he could not hope to fill the *Amato*.

So he told the anxious supercargo who came ashore from the *Amato* the minute she dropped her hook. But he went to work to do his best, although somehow that mysterious prescience followed him like a shadow. His pupil and guest, Warden, caught the fever of the game and went so far as to leap himself to the driver's seat of a newly arrived dray, shoulder the proprietor off and drive the load of bananas into the Caribbean's shed.

"There!" he cried, dismounting, flushed with battle. "I like this game, *busha!*"

"You —— fool!" said Hambridge thickly. "You can't do that. He's Pereira's man. It's contract fruit."

"What's the odds! He's turned a trick or two on us! All's fair——"

"Drive out that dray!" said the *busha* to the negro planter who had picked himself up and was calling down anathema upon "de mad young *buccra* from obersea."

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Warden of his father's employee.

"Nothing," said Hambridge with a queer laugh.

He waved a hand to the spangled skies. "God's in 's heav'n——"

HE TURNED and walked, slightly unsteady, toward the shack across the way. Warden remained, stunned out of action. Hambridge, the best man the Caribbean had, the man his governor chose for his example in the business, had been drinking!

No doubt the negro hands knew it and slacked accordingly. It seemed to Warden that most of them were drunk, too. No wonder! They did precisely what the *busha* did. He was a white man and could do no wrong. What he did was worthy of emulation.

No wonder Pereira was winning—had won—banana hands up! He would hate to tell the governor of this, but—he ought to. Hambridge was the company's best man. Ye gods! Drunk!

Presently the *busha* came back. There was the curious grin on his face, the inane smirk of a man half-paralyzed by liquor.

"Come on!" said Warden, thinking the lapse might be merely temporary—a touch of fever and consequent light-headedness. "Let's lean up against it. We'll turn a trick on that lavender chest yet!"

"What's the use?" gulped Hambridge, slumping down on his bench. "He wins. —— tax on b'nanas anyway!"

"Wins!" shouted Warden, his Yankee hatred of defeat cropping out. "Not by a darn sight! And if you're that sort of weak-spined rabbit——"

Hardly knowing what he expected to accomplish right away, he grabbed a bunch of bananas from the hands of one of the negroes and—just as quickly dropped it again. He sprang back aghast. The negro also leaped away.

From the bunch had dropped a huge spider, even larger than that which had dismayed him in the shack.

"Spidah!" yelled the negro.

It was Mitch-Chell.

Warden, ashamed of the fact that the bunch he had dropped had burst into three pieces, sprang with both feet upon the insect, intent upon vengeance. He did not miss. That spider emerged from the impact a flat mess of pulp and quivering, hairy legs.

"Now you've done it!" said the Anglo-Jamaican overseer. "That settles it. I tell you—" He hiccouped—"might's well a killed Nancy this morning. Nancy heard ya, an'way. Killed the luck! That settl' zit. 'Ve killed a Nanzi spider!"

"But, *busha*—!" Mitch-Chell protested.

"Shut up—you!" shouted Hambridge, glaring at his henchman.

"But, *busha*——"

"Will you close your black mouth!" roared the *busha*. "Get me a drink!"

"My God!" groaned Warden, the pupil, and he turned toward the shack in despair.

He would have to talk to the governor.

Before he entered the shack he looked back at the wharf-shed. The chief runner, Mitch-Chell, appeared to be arguing with the *busha*. Hambridge had gripped the negro by the shoulders—possibly for support or in drunken affection—and he was laughing in his face. Warden went to the room in the shack where he had slept every night for nearly a week—for no purpose except to be alone with his thoughts. The first thing his eyes sought and found was the Ananzi spider of the morning, still impending over his cot.

It had not moved. It was like a dead insect fastened by some invisible web.

Only the light of the hurricane lamp caught two little gleaming points in its head.

He shuddered slightly. He desired to kill it, attributing to the strange creature somehow the ill-luck of the day; desiring more to slay it because Hambridge seemed to believe in its power, that he himself was half-inclined. . .Bah!

He picked up one of his still sodden bathing-shoes and balanced it for an accurate shot. But as he swung his arm a voice, thick with inebriation, said behind him:

"Don' do it! Musn' do it, ol' fella!"

Warden gave the *busha* one contemptuous look and hurled the shoe with all his force. The spider vanished. The American turned furiously upon the overseer, who was chuckling inanely. Hambridge pointed waveringly to the opposite wall.

"Misshed!" said he.

There was the spider! How it had got over there, whether it had leaped or—some magic. It seemed impossible; yet there it was.

The overseer reeled toward the washstand. He poured a half tumbler of liquid from a black bottle which had stood there and drained it off. Then he fairly collapsed on his cot.

Warden, disgusted, dismayed beyond expression, went out into the night. A fury raged in him. He would not let his dad lose because his dad's trusted best man had fallen down.

He took charge; but he might as well have followed the *busha's* example, at least in the matter of going to bed. The hands listened dully to his orders, or quite ignored them. They, too, had slacked up. They, too, had been drinking. They worked slowly, clumsily. Bunches of bananas were dropped and shattered. They pitched other bunches into the whaleboat, bruising them against marketable possibility. They allowed dray after dray to run the gantlet unchallenged. The victorious Pereira on the other horn chuckled as he heard of the doings.

"Soused—on Banana Day!" he said to his chief runner. "Never knew him take a drink before, even. Well, it's an ill wind—my tally says twenty-two thousand bunches. How about yours, Amos?"

As a last resort Warden appealed to Mitch-Chell, the faithful. Upon him, too, the spell of evil had descended. He, too, seemed more than half drunk.

*"Wehfado, buccra?"* ("What else can we do, white man?") he said. *"You no kill Nancy spidah, buccra?"*

THE Amalgamated's steamer, *Haciendado*, cleared at midnight with her holds full. The Caribbean's *Amato* cleared hours later with less than half the cargo for which she had capacity. She headed back to Port Maria for instructions. It had been a disastrous week for the independents, especially at Rio Hacha. Pereira had exceeded his order for fifteen thousand bunches by seven thousand. Hambridge shipped only nine thousand.

While the Caribbean's hands finished their debauch on the beach at the eastern end of the bay and on the other horn Pereira's victors celebrated, Warden returned to the shack, tired, disappointed, disgusted. On the other cot lay the *busha*, apparently dead to the world. By his side was a broken chair and on it the black bottle and a glass.

What was the man drinking, anyway? The dregs in the glass were not red or brown or amber, but transparent and colorless. Was it possible he had sunk secretly to the last resort of the tropic tippler—gin?

Sadly anxious to know the worst, Warden tiptoed to the side of the man he had admired until that night. He smelled of the liquid in the glass. It had no odor. Neither had the remainder of it in the black bottle. He poured a few drops on the palm of his left hand and touched it with the tip of his tongue.

It was plain water! Yet . . . .

IN THE morning there was little to be said. The *busha*, naturally enough, slept late. Warden took his dip in the Rio Hacha alone.

Pereira came around, as usual after Banana Day, to talk it over, offer to shake hands and call it a deal for another week. On this occasion he expressed the sympathy of good fellowship.

"We all do it, even the best of us, at times," said he. "Suppose you have a hair of the dog, Hambridge?"

"No, massa," said Hambridge gravely. "I never touch the stuff."

Pereira chuckled and helped himself from the bottle he had brought along for diplomatic use.

When Warden came back from the river he found them seated together, quite friendly, talking over the setting of a turtle net.

Warden did not like it. The dark thought occurred that these two—alone so much together—might be closer than he had been led to believe; that possibly the Amalgamated, through Pereira, had bought the *busha* into the secret service of the trust. He would certainly have a talk with the governor.

After the late tropic breakfast Warden announced his intention of returning to Port Maria. The *busha* did not press him to remain. The farewells were rather awkward. Warden felt he ought to be frank.

"I'm sorry, Hambridge," said he, "but there were things last night. I needn't say more, except that it's clearly up to me, as my father's son——"

"Go ahead," said the *busha* wearily. "When I make an ass of myself I bray but don't kick. It's my funeral. So long."

When Warden Jr. told Warden Sr. of the matter of which he felt he was bound to speak, the governor's face expressed utter disappointment and dismay.

"If you weren't my own son I'd call you a liar," said he. "But this explains yesterday. I've been twisting my brain for some explanation of the fall-down of Rio Hacha. We didn't expect Hambridge to raise twenty-two thousand bunches as Pereira did—he gets half that in contracted fruit—but we did bank on twelve thousand, maybe fifteen. He was authorized to go Pereira's limit, and then some. I didn't understand, but now—Hambridge! Drunk! And I'd meant to make him general manager. Well, I'll give him a fair hearing."

Hambridge, upon a summons to Port Maria next day, rode there huddled in his saddle like a bag of loose bricks. His face was stamped with wo and his brow furrowed with remorse. Possibly he had been an ass, a superstitious fool, but ever since that time he lost on the favorite in the Overseers' Sweepstakes he had been more and more inclined to listen to that inward voice. No, not voice. That. . .What was it the Americans called it? Ah, well, it didn't matter now.

It was therefore a much surprised overseer who, walking listlessly into Warden Sr's. office at Port Maria, suddenly found himself enclosed in that banana magnate's arms and being given a lesson in the two-step.

The *busha* backed off. The head of the independent company trod mincingly around the office, cackling like a gander and waving a pink slip of paper.

"Go out and get drunk again, Hambridge, me boy," he chanted chortlingly. "Go out and get paralyzed!"

"I never touch the stuff," said the *busha*, his usual languid tones heavy with melancholy.

"Eh!" ejaculated Warden Sr. "But there—that's all right. Don't discuss it. I won't. Luckiest thing ever happened, only don't do it again. Listen to this!"

He started to read the cablegram, but broke off to explain in full what the laconic words meant.

"Bottom's dropped out of the boom banana market," he declaimed. "Tax on bananas gone up in smoke. 'Constant Reader' and 'Pro Bono Publico' and the 'poor man's food' and all that—killed it before it was born. Markets flooded with bananas to be sold at a loss by dealers. Prices dropped through the basement floor and——"

"*And—?*" the *busha* chimed in, leaning forward with a great light in his eyes.

"*And!*" roared Warden Sr. "The Amalgamated has six steamers crammed to the gunwales steaming seventeen knots to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston, and they'll have to chuck the whole caboodle overboard, as they've done before, or further spoil the market. The Caribbean loses only a poor half cargo on the *Amato*, for the *Jacquelin* and the *Portuondo* of our fleet couldn't make up and turned over their fruit to the *Amato* and didn't sail at all!"

"*Imphm!*" was the *busha's* comment.

There was a queer look on his sun-scorched face.

"Now, as to my getting drunk—"

"Not a word!" interrupted Warden Sr. "As I say, it was the luckiest thing ever happened, only——"

"As to my getting drunk," continued Hambridge lazily, "it was like this. One time I bet a month's salary and a fifty-dollar saddle on a sure thing in the Overseers'——"

"Oh, can that old yarn! Only——"

"And ever since I've sort of leaned to a bet on the possibility of a rank outsider finishing first. Now, I had a feeling——"

"A hunch?" said Warden Sr., becoming grave at once.

"Much obliged," said the *busha*, relieved. "I've been hunting that word for nearly two days—a hunch. I had a hunch that that tax wouldn't go through, and the high prices of the last month and the way we've been flooding the market meant—you see? My hunch was for its happening this week, between sailing and arriving in the States—within these five days. It was such a strong—er—hunch. Then there was a fool thing about a Nancy spider——"

"What about the Ananzi spider?" asked some one in the doorway.

It was Warden Jr., a curious grin on his face.

"Hullo, Warden," said Hambridge coolly, and went on, "Maybe that was what got me started. Your young man here missed it with his boot and it stayed right in the room all day. Maybe I pleaded for its life and—maybe Ananzi took a hand in gratitude."

Warden Sr. was shaking with mirth. He knew the native-born Jamaican's superstition about Br'er Ananzi.

"The Nancy stayed in the room and I got a feeling—a hunch—it had something on its mind; that it had a hunch, too, and wanted to tip me off on a sure thing.

"When I got word how badly things were going at the other ports, I went to the shack and had a long confab with Br'er 'Nancy—in my mind, you know. *That's* what was on my mind," turning to Warden Jr. "Fever be blowed! And when you suggested a drink—a thing I never do—it occurred to me the only way to cover up a lie-down before Pereira was to get paralyzed. I drank so much water out of that black bottle that after you left I had to go over to Sam Chung's for a real drink—something I never do.

"It was just a—a hunch, you see."

"Hmm! There was a good deal of cold reasoning behind that hunch," said Warden Sr.

"I'm sorry, old man," said Warden Jr. "Honest—I thought you were really—all to the bad, and—and I was disappointed. I'm frank, and I want to apologize."

"I meant you to think so," said the *busha*. "I meant everybody to think so—so it would come straight to Pereira. Even Mitch-Chell believed it until I put him on and thereafter he proceeded to demoralize the whole handling staff."

"But why pretend to be drunk at all?" asked Warden Jr.

"As I never touch the stuff," the *busha* drawled, "it was the only thing would account to Pereira for my falling down. He would have been suspicious of anything else and would have got a—a hunch, maybe, that I had private information from headquarters. A throw-down of the tax on bananas would have been the first thing to occur to him. I didn't want him to put that into the heads of the Amalgamates at Port Antonio. I wanted 'em to go on buying—and they sure did. I helped 'em all I could."

"But how can you give any credit to the Ananzi, or my not killing it? Didn't I smash one to pulp that time in the wharfshed?"

"Oh, that?" said Hambridge with a queer smile. "Mitch-Chell knew. That's why I had to shut him up sharp. I wanted you to think it was a Nancy. If it had been, I'd ha' known we were really in bad. *That* was a tarantula!

"Your Nancy is still doing business at the same stand. It was right on the ceiling over my head last night when Pereira, Sam Chung, the police force and I had our little weekly game. Sam Chung has a mortgage now on the constable's horse and I stung Pereira for eighty-seven cold dollars."

However, when the *busha* was promoted to the general managership at Port Maria, Warden Sr. presented him with a seal ring upon which was engraved the great god Ananzi in the shape of a spider, somewhat reduced.

# MAZE OF MEMORY

by S.B.H. HURST

*Author of "The Tide-Mating," "Taste of the Salt," etc.*

I SAW him surveying the house with great care, until, as if satisfied, he put his hand on the gate and tentatively fumbled with the catch. But, having gone so far, he hesitated; and I, watching him from behind window curtains, intolerant of strangers, cordially hating all manner of sellers of things and suspicious of every one else, found myself curiously disappointed when he nervously took his hand off the gate and began to walk away.

An old man, whom I knew at once for a sailor, he acted for all the world like a boy who has a fault to confess and dreads the consequences of his confession; and as he walked slowly away he kept turning his head to look back, so I went out to the porch, and sat down in the long cane chair I keep there during fine weather; and he, seeing me do this, turned about and walked toward the gate again, his keen old eyes taking in every detail of me, although he at no time allowed his scrutiny to develop the rudeness of a stare.

Then, as I was wondering what he would do next, he threw open the gate with startling abandon, and began an extraordinary progress up the path of my garden, while I tried to make a diagnosis from his walk—at first inclining to tablets, but switching almost immediately to alcohol, because of the absence of certain indications of the former malady. But suddenly my shameful pathological promptings were swept aside, and, half rising from my chair, I realized that the ragged vagabond capering so curiously up the path was performing his involved gyrations from an excess of pure joy.

What little thing is it that brings recognition after many years? The face of my visitor was covered with a ragged growth, obliterating the trim mustache memory looked for; and the weird dance of his undignified approach bravely tried to hide a knee-tremble which was an unkindly stranger to the husky young Irishman who had taught me to steer. And his rags, and the sorry existence they proclaimed as he careered along with but a pitiful physical echo of the jocularly active Brennan whom I knew before life's bubbles lost their colors and most of them burst. And by what uncanny methods had he found me?

I had his hand, and our eyes met bashfully—as if all the things we had done since we last saw each other were watching us, making us diffident; and we did not at first speak, finding our throats very dry. But there would be much to tell, and I would listen, as I did when a boy, to his tales. In that last word lurks the courtesy due a guest.

He teetered just a bit from weariness as I led him inside, where he took off his nondescript hat with the respectful politeness of the sailor going aft to the cabin; and he admired my bits of things with that silent flattery which is instinctive with the Irish but unknown to any other race. Then we drank, as yet wordless, because there was so much to say that neither of us knew where to begin.

"And how did you find me—by accident?" I asked, after we had beamed at each other for several minutes.

He had about him—exuded it, in fact—something more than a mere atmosphere of heavily tarred rigging and strange old cargoes of dead and gone sailing ships. The mystery and magic of the sea enfolded him, so that he might have been a goodly company of seafaring men woven cunningly into one personality, yet with every strand of the weave showing distinctly—coming from the loft of eternity to the measuring loom of time: Drake's men, Hawkins' men, pirates, adventurers and decent seamen. These looked at me from the back of his eyes when he grinned:

"As to that, it was easy. I meets an old shipmate—hadn't seen him for years—and we gets to talking. He was after, he told me, with a scheme he had to catch a submarine alive, before the square-headed crew of her could destroy the innards of her out of shape, so to speak. A reward, he tells me, he'll get for the catching of one. By and by your name comes up."

I smiled back at him, brushing aside the memory of the weaknesses that had brought him to his pathetic age, remembering only that once he had been my ideal, and that always he had been my friend.

"That would be Ted Gillet," I answered. "He left here when the State went dry. An old, old man for such a job—if he meant it!"

"So I came along," added Brennan luminously. "Of course Ted told me about you and where you lived, but him being such a liar always I had to come along here to see for myself."

"And very welcome," I said.

"Ye were a small boy at sea, and me showing ye the ropes," he went on, after lighting his pipe. "And how long is it now?"

"Oh, it must be thirty-five years," I admitted.

"And ye remember it all?"

"I do. You began instructing me by explaining how it was the stars in the China Sea moved around the world the opposite way to what they do in the Atlantic."

"And the fight I trained ye for?" he asked eagerly.

Yes, I remembered, for it brought me fine weather, but that Brennan should have dragged it up—oh, well, he is Brennan. Now, I wonder will you think, as I do often, that coincidence lifted a corner of the veil that night, and showed me reality?

IT HAPPENED in Liverpool, with me hardened to a most plebeian toughness, the ship lying in the Herculanean Dock, and Brennan running aboard with much excitement and a few drinks in him to find me.

"I've been ashore," he made needless explanation. "Now, Barney, me boy, lay aside your book, and get out of your bunk for a blessed minute—it's a teacher of school ye'll be some day, that's sure—and listen to me, will ye?"

I put the book under my pillow, and attended with the gravity befitting what promised to be a matter of importance.

"It's a fight," he plunged to finality.

Books were as far as the moon, borne away by the atavistic tidal wave raised by the vision of combat.

"Between—?" I asked, getting out of my bunk quickly.

"You and a red-headed feller," he explained.

"Oh," I answered, looking at the door of the forecastle, and expecting it to frame my antagonist.

"A real, proper fight, with a referee and all," went on Brennan, interpreting my look. "Sit down, and I'll tell ye."

So we sat down on the wooden chest containing his few belongings, and he talked zestfully.

"He works for the keeper of a public house just a bit off Paradise Street, at swabbing floors and washing glasses, and the like. A bit unhealthy he looks, but, oh, the ugly face of him. The ugly face and the red head of him—fighting signs, me boy. You've a lot of training to do, with me for your trainer. I've bet ten shillings on ye, and the spectators will make up a 'purse', as it's called, of three or four bob, for the winner. A hard, ugly face he has—but I'll have ye in condition."

"When is it to be?" I asked.

"This very night," replied Brennan.

To his racial peculiarities Brennan added a topsey-turvy fashion of doing things that was all his own, but he was too much my ideal sailor for me to utter criticism. Yet I may have ventured a suggestion concerning my condition, and the lack of any need of even the startlingly intensive "training" he planned for me. But he was decided.

Fights he had known in plenty, but never such a fight as this. Usually he had been a principal, a more than willing combatant;

but now he was an organizer, a director, a trainer, a second, a man of functions. And this was no common fight—no mere difference of opinion followed by a blow and a struggle among cuspidors and men's feet on a barroom floor.

No, this was to be a well-conducted contest, with—had he not told me—a watch for the keeper of time, a referee, certain wagers and a purse for the winner. And was not training the invariable preliminary to all such deliberate entertainments? Was, then, a small matter like shortness of time to be allowed to upset a well-established custom? Would we let the keeper of the public house, the referee and all the other patrons of sport think us ignorant?

Brennan was very serious. And there was the other side of it. Did he not want to do the best for me? And how could I fight my best if I were not trained? I was not sure myself, and my vague notions respecting time were dissipated by his earnestness. Only, there did seem to be something wrong about training for a fight a few hours away. But who was I to argue, and hurt his feelings? Besides, if it hadn't been for him there wouldn't have been any fight. And no fight meant no purse of three or four shillings.

Three or four shillings would buy a lot of second-hand books. And Brennan might be right, after all. Of course I was big and strong, and had taught myself to read almost all the words in my precious books, but—I was only a bit over fifteen, and Brennan was a man. He must know best. Train I would. And we had the ship to ourselves, for the officers and crew were ashore.

I felt that Brennan would have liked to have an audience, but there was only the old night-watchman, puffing a contemplative pipe over the galley door, and watching our performance with a face expressive of the utmost approval.

The shadows gathered as I trained—around the deck as fast as I could run, and up and down the rigging almost as rapidly—until the few lanterns that flickered about the dock told that the night of adventure was upon us. The day-time voice of the city had hushed to a soothing undertone, the smoke of the many chimneys was drifting out to sea in fantastic shapes which it would never again assume, and I, utterly exhausted, was fed with mastodonic zeal, and played with advice that I regarded as cunning beyond price.

Then, hardly able to move, I was assisted to my bunk, where I at once fell asleep.

Shades of an ultra-perfect digestion, and an imagination as little likely to trouble as a faithful dog to bite! An hour later I was awakened, and I awoke reluctantly—so tired and sleepy that even the lure of disfiguring another human had no attraction for me. And with Brennan in the smelly, dimly lit forecastle was the night-watchman, shrilling unheeded reminiscences in the cracked treble of age about the gory battles in which he himself had had a hand.

An examination into my physical condition followed, the result of which afforded entire satisfaction to both my trainer and his ancient admirer. Often, in the light of the knowledge of further years, did I muse upon the method of that examination, finding a fascination in its uniqueness—as if, testing the fitness of a horse about to run a race, the color of its tail was the crucial consideration. Yet I was genuinely glad that Brennan found no fault in me, and that the night-watchman's toothless comments rose to the shrill exclamation that he wouldn't mind betting a shilling on me himself, that he wouldn't.

So what wonder if I took on new dignity as I dressed to go ashore—a dignity that a chill drizzle, pattering in a melancholy way into the water of the dock, and dripping dismally off everything else, in no wise ruffled or upset. The gaunt masts and rigging of many ships looked an impartial understanding out of their own stressful lives, the watchman waved his smoky lantern, and I set out upon my crusade with my squire carrying a pair of swimming trunks—the armor in which I was to fight.

And, indeed, I felt something of knighthood in my attitude toward the affair, spite of the victor's wreath being a matter of three or four shillings: for was I not content to fight without question, out of sheer loyalty to my rather erratic friend, who had shown his faith in me by what to him was a large wager? Could I imagine keener joy than that coming from his pat on the back of gratitude when he pocketed the money I had won for him?

And the prospect of the fight itself was no mean delight, and every step of our muddy progress brought its thrill of anticipation. Little fun had life offered me—no school, no playmates, never a "show" or a "party"—what wonder, then, that I became as happy and excited at the thought of what was before me as a luckier child would have been on the way to a circus.

But Brennan did not guess my state of mind. Perhaps I seemed thoughtful, for I saw him glancing at me furtively whenever we passed under a street lamp, and he began to regale me with funny stories, told with a nervous haste that betrayed his fear of my mental condition—something which even his system of training could not take care of—the while he pushed his way through the crowds with an eye to my protection from the jostling drunkenness of both sexes.

His solicitude pleased and flattered me. Indeed, I strutted, swelling slightly at my unusual importance—for I had no memory of ever having been of greater consequence than a fathom of rope or a pot of paint.

A FEW yards past the grotesquely abominable "Museum of Anatomy," we turned down a dingy side-street that had no lamps of its own, and into which the lights of the main thoroughfare hardly penetrated. It was a very narrow place, uneven cobblestones under foot, and no sidewalk.

Two gin-sodden women veritably flung themselves at us, hiccuping, "Hello, dearie," like two cuckoo clocks. They clawed at us as they swayed, and Brennan grabbed my hand and hurried me along, the women laughing jarringly after us. Creatures of a bat-like repulsiveness brushed past us, others leaned against the walls with a lack of movement that was mummy-like, their baleful eyes watching with the inhumanity of devilfish.

Brennan muttered an explanation which I did not catch, and presently we reached a wooden door which he pushed open to admit us to the back yard of the public house; a place littered with empty casks, bottles, straw and packing-cases, through which raffle we made our way to the door of the cellar, where my friend paused and put a hand on my shoulder. He loomed up wetly in the gloom. and his voice trembled slightly, as if he were cold.

"Ye ain't afraid, are ye, Barney?" he asked.

"Of course not," I answered, not quite truthfully, for the latter part of the walk had made me nervous.

"It's the quick way of me to settle things between two drinks, me boy, without so much as your leave. But ye don't mind, do ye?"

"Of course not," I repeated, shaking the rain from my cap.

"And ye don't feel—ye feel all right?"

"Yes."

"Then," with a rather feeble laugh, "let's go in out of the wet."

He knocked on the door, but nobody answered. So he knocked again, more loudly. And then we heard footsteps, and the drawing of bolts, and the door opened widely enough for a head to protrude and break the uncanny secrecy of the performance by asking what we wanted.

"It's us," whispered Brennan.

A gust of wind blew a spluttering of rain, and the head swore.

"And who in —— is 'us'?"

"Me and the boy for the fight," explained my companion.

"Oh," said the head, withdrawing itself to open the door. "Why didn't you say that at first? Come in."

We entered what felt like a narrow passage, and the owner of the place—for the man who had opened the door was this important person—fumblingly replaced his bolts and bars, panting obesely as he did so. It was as dark as a tomb, and smelt horribly. I shivered for many reasons, and was cheered but little when the saloon-keeper lit a piece of candle which he produced from somewhere about his person after a series of grunts—each grunt indicating a different place of search.

I looked at him apprehensively in the little light. He can be simply described as a selfish mass of fat, impregnated with villainy. He started to paw me with a beastly hand, but I shuddered away from him.

"Scared, eh?" he sneered.

I did not answer, so he turned to Brennan, who stood regarding the brute with that species of awe which partially paralyzes. The bird shows it when the cat approaches, certain animals bow before the snake because of it, and the old-time sailor always manifested it when in the presence of the crimp or saloon-keeper, both of whom made their living by robbing him. Brennan answered servilely, and I felt shocked.

"You say he ain't sixteen?" the saloon-keeper grunted.

"Just a bit over fifteen," replied Brennan, with a deprecating giggle.

"——," exclaimed the other, "he's ugly enough for twenty."

Brennan laughed loudly, and seemed delighted that the other appreciated his laughter.

"And where's your boy?" he asked, showing pride in the saloon-keeper's toleration of his tentative familiarity.

"Oh, I never lets him out till the fight is ready to start. He's that fierce that if he saw your boy he'd jump at him and tear him to bits. And then there wouldn't be no fight."

Again Brennan laughed, his care for me forgotten. He laughed until the fat man hushed him with a reminder about the police, who were very active at suppressing these illegal fights—hence the cellar. Then they turned and walked down the passage together, and I trailed along behind, physically and spiritually sick, keeping back my tears with a great effort.

The saloon-keeper opened another door, and the place of battle flared before us, lit with lanterns strung from the floor above and along the walls. A small—far-too-small—ring, without any padding, occupied the center of the cellar, and crowded around it upon a heterogeneous collection of seats were about two dozen men, who were varying the monotony of smoking by spitting generously upon that part of the floor where presently I would have to stand and fight.

We were greeted by what the parliamentary reports call "cheers and laughter," and I shrank under the unkindly curiosity of the spectators, whose attention was unnecessarily directed to my unhappy self by the owner of the place—

"'Ere's the fighter!" he announced.

Then he said something to Brennan which I did not hear, and my "second" beckoned me to follow him to a corner of the room, where I shiveringly undressed and put on the swimming-trunks, after wringing the rain out of them as well as I could. Of course I had no rubber shoes, only my clumsy every-day affairs, but Brennan did not appear to notice this need, or, perhaps, he did not know that they were needed.

Yet I tried to smile at him, finding no hate in me, and—oh, well, we all revolve within our limitations, the years have mellowed the memories, and the seed of early association has grown into a friendship that finds nothing to forgive.

Then a burst of real cheering announced the entrance of my antagonist, and I looked over at him, startled and much afraid. Brennan had said that he was ugly, and his description was not unkind. The saloon-keeper had said that I was ugly enough for twenty. I do not flatter myself, but using the same method of calculation the boy I was about to fight must have been nearly a thousand; and he was at least twenty pounds heavier.

Then Brennan led me back to the ring, leaving my one poor suit as a careless offering to any thief that unpleasant gathering might contain, and I found myself sitting on an up-ended box, waiting for the end of the world and hoping it would come quickly. The main events of my unhappy little life came before me, and I had not felt so miserable since somebody stole the barrel in which for three weeks I had once made my home. For Brennan was the one friend I had known, the only human being from whom I could remember receiving any sign of affection, any sort of kindness; and now he had denied me for the laughter of a saloon-keeper.

AT THE opposite corner sat my rugged opponent, attended by his seconds—two young fellows like himself, posturing with what they obviously regarded as the correct amount of toughness. The spectators were pridefully advertising their friendship for the boy I was to fight with vociferous questions concerning his health, and to these questions he returned the properly condescending replies; but after some minutes of this they became silent, and I found myself the object of their wordless appraisement.

I tried to look back at them all, not to show my courage, but with the vague, vain hope of finding just one spark of pity, which perhaps might lead them to "let me off"—my body shaking with the mixed emotions of a schoolboy about to be publicly thrashed, and a felon waiting to be hanged. But there was no pity, only regret that I did not appear to be enough of a fighter to make the affair interesting.

Then Brennan patted me timidly on the back, and I felt that he was sorry for what he had done; so I warmed to him, like a hungry dog grateful to the one foot in a crowd that does not kick him.

There was a slight disturbance at the back of the crowd where some steps led to the bar above, and the saloon-keeper appeared, half-supporting a tall, thin man with a huge mustache, who was evidently very drunk, but whose dress, and an indefinable something, proclaimed the "gentleman"—a proclamation which the extreme deference of the owner of the house corroborated. With some difficulty this person was assisted to a seat at the ringside, where he immediately fell asleep.

"Captain Blake, the referee," announced the saloon-keeper, pulling out his watch with the intimation that he would keep time and look after the refereeing until the captain "felt better"; an arrangement to which no one offered any objection—for after all the "fight" was merely a show, to amuse the customers of the place into buying more drinks from the two frowsy potmen who were kept busy navigating through the fog of tobacco smoke.

Blake had probably offered to referee in a moment of drunken whimsy, and the saloon-keeper, anxious to oblige a good customer, had accepted the offer, regarding the appointment as a distinctly humorous formality and using it as an added lure for Brennan's bet of ten shillings. For it is unlikely that any of the spectators saw any necessity for having a referee, and some of them saw no need for a timekeeper—prefering to see me beaten to a pulp without the minute rests between punishments; but the majority were of a more epicurean leaning, with esthetic tastes demanding a more lingering brutality.

Only Brennan found a glimmering of doubt regarding the ethical status of this dual official, and, doubtless feeling that his cordial reception at the cellar door entitled him to intimacy, he approached the saloon-keeper smiling deprecatingly and timidly whispered his objection, adding, as his reason for speaking, a laughing but most undiplomatic reference to the ten shillings—which, by the way, he had not only bet with the saloon-keeper, but, also, with child-like faith, had "put up" with him.

"Ho," shouted the master of the ceremonies loudly, "wot is it?"

In the dead silence that naturally followed Brennan murmured something about the double job being too much for one man.

"Speak up," bellowed the saloon-keeper, making great pretense of listening with a hand cupped over an ear. "Speak up, I carnt 'ear yer."

But Brennan could not speak, up or otherwise. Under the leering gaze of every man in the place, except the sleeping Blake, he flushed and shuffled his feet uneasily. Then, with a pitiful effort to appear unconcerned, he returned to his place behind me, the saloon-keeper winking elaborately to the crowd and raising an appreciative laugh. For Brennan, so far as the owner of the place was concerned, had long ceased to exist, and the wager had changed hands when the money had changed pockets.

It was always thus with Brennan's type ashore. In a ship's forecastle, not only would their positions have been reversed, but the fat man would have been washing Brennan's place after meals—out of sight of land, that is. Now my friend was as helpless as a shanghaied sailor in the power of the crimp, and he tried to hide his ignominy by whispering plaintively to me:

"The referee, me boy, is a real gentleman—he'll see ye get fair play. Once he was an officer in the army—just a bit of a habit he had of cheating at cards was what got him put out. So——"

But his doubtful testimonial was interrupted by the saloon-keeper, who called "Time," and waved his hand expressively. Then I saw my opponent dancing toward me in fighting attitude—I forgot to mention that it was a "bare fist" fight—and all that I knew of right and wrong bade me get up and meet him. But I was unable to move. I sat helpless, not so much from fear—although fear was but half-suppressed—as from a strange pity that suddenly grew into a most extraordinary fondness for every one in that cellar, the result of the emotional storm I had been through. I craved affection, not contest.

And my opponent was coming nearer—he had almost reached the center of the ring—but still I could not move. My thoughts were racing past my ego, like hurricane-torn clouds driving across the face of the moon. The dreams of my very earliest years whirled up from the dark horizon of forgetfulness, and I wondered again why I had been put into a world for which I had no desire. I forgot, became oblivious to my surroundings.

The fact of another human's intention to "beat me up" became as relatively unimportant as it was absolutely so. The hoarse roaring of the spectators was the wind in the rigging, and it was soothing. I was very sleepy, and I would go to sleep. Yes, I would sleep, and perhaps I would not be obliged to wake up any more.

But there was a discordant note in the wind, and because of that discord I could not sleep. I tried to ignore it, but it persisted with devilish insistency. And then I made out that it was Brennan's voice howling, and patting my back as he howled:

"Up at him, Barney, and scatter every feature of his face."

At that I jumped to my feet, and made for my opponent, who had just reached the center of the small ring. I had no wish to fight, and I was still a bit dazed, and I looked at the red-headed boy with the forlorn friendliness of a stray puppy. He laughed at me, dropping his hands insultingly; whereupon the saloon-keeper, who was still in the ring, also laughed, and the jovial spectators added their hilarity to the general mirth. Now, even a dog resents being laughed at.

A cold anger stiffened my spine, cleared my tired brain and added strength to my body; an ancient ancestor lent me his stone-age ferocity, the cruelty of those who had long been dust stirred my blood, and a curiously pleasant determination to smash the ugly face of my antagonist became the sole reason of existence. He leaned toward me tauntingly, his hands by his sides, and as his vile breath puffed into my face I jabbed him viciously on the nose—the sudden spurt of blood cheering me more than anything I had ever seen. He hit back, and his blow landed somewhere, but I felt no pain. So, we stood, toe to toe, slugging at each other.

I MUST imagine that the spectators were surprised, and that the saloon-keeper nearly dropped his watch in astonishment, for I was too busy to notice them; but the pained grunts of my opponent were not imaginary, nor was the change that underwent his expression—not only that of blood and bruises, but the change from the grinning leer of confidence to the dawning fear of possible defeat.

He stepped back, and I followed; then he desperately drove at me until he bore me by sheer weight to my corner, getting home a terrific blow on my left eye which almost blinded me; then for some time we struggled in a clinch, the referee making no attempt to separate us, because I was at a disadvantage owing to my being the lighter.

But, in spite of Brennan's training, I was in the better condition by far. Even with his extra weight, my opponent tired of the wrestling before I did, and at last he loosened his hold on me and stepped back, dropping his guard as he did so. Seeing my opportunity, I drove my fist into that part of his body where ribs cease to be ribs—where flesh is weak, and had my full strength been behind it, that blow would have ended the fight, but, as I hit him, his fist hit my biceps, and the power of my punch was lessened.

Nevertheless, it looked as if he would collapse. His knees sagged inward, his head dropped forward, and so sure was I that all was over that I stepped back without the finishing blow I could have so easily given. Then he pluckily straightened, and began to retreat. Too late, I followed excitedly, hitting at him with far more energy than skill, making most remarkable swings at his head, more often than not missing that ugly aim by a foot, and forgetting all about the vulnerable portion of his anatomy I had recently disturbed.

Why hadn't I finished him when I had the chance? Why had I held back—wasn't I there to beat him up? Was I going to let him win? And so on—I prodded myself into a sort of desperation, forgetting what little boxing I knew, but utterly changed from the scared child who had come into that cellar. Twice I bumped into the saloon-keeper, who had cast aside the dignities of timekeeper and referee, and who was exhorting his boy with the zeal of both backer and second—the boy responding by swinging at me as wildly as I swung at him, and making about as many hits.

It was a frantic scene, with the spectators on their feet, yelling advice and criticism, dropping pipes and upsetting beer mugs, hands waving, fists pounding palms.

Sometimes I got a glimpse of their faces, gibbering like strangely pale baboons at the bars of a cage, with the uncertain fog of smoke billowing fantastically. Occasionally I slipped, and occasionally the other boy slipped, but a curious chivalry grew between us, so that neither hit when the other was on his knees.

But I could see that the saloon-keeper

could hardly keep from hitting at me himself, and knew that at the first chance he would do something foul to defeat me. And here I must give credit to my antagonist; for once when his boss told him, commanded him, to hit me when I was down, he found something in his soul which told that obese brute to "go to ——!"

The noise increased, and wilder became our boxing. It seemed ages since I had drawn a satisfactory breath, and my throbbing heart was reaching up into my throat. The lights swayed uncertainly, and my opponent's ghastly, bloody face was as difficult to hit as that of the chief devil in a nightmare. The arcs described by our swinging fists became smaller, and the fists themselves took on the weight of cannon-balls.

Amid my physical distress I found myself wondering if my face was as badly mauled as that of the red-headed boy. Then, as if both of the same mind, we fell into a clinch, sobbing, not breathing, upon each other's shoulder; and through the tumult of voices came that of the saloon-keeper—

"Time."

Instead of three minutes, we must have been fighting for ten; and whether he stopped us because we could fight no longer, or because he was afraid the noise would bring the police, is something I have never decided. With uncertain steps, I staggered in the general direction of Brennan, but instead of taking the box he hastily pushed forward for me to sit upon I lay down upon that indescribably dirty stone floor, finding it as delicious a haven as ever offered by a feather bed.

And my unexpected success had won me some adherents. Half-conscious, I knew that a pillow of empty sacks was being put under my buzzing head, that rough hands were lifting my brusied body tenderly and laying another sack between it and the floor, and that Brennan was fanning me with amateurish vigor and the tails of my shirt, but I also knew that no power either in heaven or in earth could get me in shape to continue the fight at the end of the prescribed interval of one minute.

I need not have concerned myself, for the saloon-keeper had no intention of allowing his duty as timekeeper to interfere with the workings of his "natural affection" for his protégé. He was swearing horribly at the unfortunate boy because I was as yet unlicked, while the two seconds rubbed and fanned him, but several minutes passed without his showing any interest in his watch, and I knew that the red-headed one would be allowed to fully recover before the next round.

But the spectators were impatient. They wanted to see somebody beaten properly, and the delay annoyed them. It was nothing to them if the saloon-keeper's boy was licked. There were other saloon-keepers with fighting boys, who sold as good beer for the same price; and as my strength and wind came back to me, until I felt almost as well as I had done before the fight, I understood what I had hitherto been ignorant of.

Competition was keen between the different public houses of the district, and, price-cutting having gone the limit, some sort of attraction was required to get the business. Hence these fighting boys. Every saloon-keeper had one, and the red-headed boy had proven the best of them all. Therefore, he was a valuable asset, and his boss did a bigger business than his rivals.

It was all very simple—had I looked to have had a chance, we would have been told at the cellar door that the fight was off; and now that I was more than holding my own, every dirty trick would be tried to defeat me. The red-headed boy lacked my condition, and the spectators were booing and whistling, like the audience in the gallery of a theater, for the show to continue.

"Time—call time," yelled one large-lunged individual at the ring side.

"'Taint quite time yet," replied the saloon-keeper placatingly, his pig-like eyes looking in my direction with an illuminating malevolence.

"Call time," the other yelled back at him. "Call——"

Then, suddenly the bibulous but sometimes benevolent god of the chances prompted him, and he leaned over and shook Captain Blake's shoulder.

"'Ere, you're the referee, ain't yer? Make 'em fight!" and he laughed heartily, the crowd laughing with him, and the saloon-keeper readily grasping the opportunity for further delay.

"Lor', Bill, you're the funny one," he wheezed. "You'll be the death of me yet."

And the funny one, greatly encouraged, again prodded the captain, who stirred uneasily and then opened his eyes and looked about him, evidently sober after his sleep.

I WAS sitting up by now, ready to go on, and the captain's eyes rested on me for a moment, and mine dropped—that is, the one I could see out of did—for I had never seen such wonderful eyes; masterful eyes that men obey, and when he looked around that motley assembly it suddenly became quiet.

"What were you saying?" he asked, his cool, cultured voice rendered the more noticeable by the environment.

"I were asking you to make 'em fight, sir," said Bill, very politely. "You're the referee, sir."

"Oh, yes—of course—forgot about it," drawled Blake, getting to his feet leisurely and adjusting a monocle. "I thank you for reminding me."

"Yes, sir—thank you, sir," replied the subdued Bill.

Of course this happened in the late eighties, when the impalpable mantle of caste brought a homage to its wearer that is less in evidence in the England of today; yet Blake was a man to command respect anywhere, when he was sober, and the easy way he obtained obedience in that cellar was not surprising—the unusual, with its more than a hint of life-tragedy, lay in his being there at all, in his non-association with his kind, in his spending his time and income in the private bar of the public house, seeking the most holy grail of forgetfulness.

He looked at the ring with a frown of disgust, and hailing one of the hurrying potmen, ordered him to bring a sack of the sawdust used to sprinkle the floor of the barroom, and spread it on the floor of the ring.

"Men can not fight on that slippery dirt," he said. "And, besides, I'm going to referee inside, American fashion."

He wiped his hands fastidiously, and fascinated me by tucking his handkerchief up his sleeve, and, the potman having spread the sawdust—the spectators watching with admiring silence—he stepped into the ring.

"Well, Briggs," he asked, "what's the delay?"

"'T'aint quite time yet, sir," answered the saloon-keeper.

"Yes, it is," yelled the crowd. "Make 'em fight, sir."

"'The voice of the people,' you know, Briggs," said the captain. "So, you're keeping time?"

"Yes, sir," Briggs' voice was full of some emotion.

"All right—get out of the ring."

"Sir?"

"Get out of the ring."

"All right, sir," obeying slowly. "It's all in your hands, sir."

"Call time, then."

Briggs obeyed, and again the red-headed boy and myself stood toe to toe, slugging at each other with more energy than skill. Now, unless he expected to get me with a lucky punch, I could see no reason for his wasting his strength with this continued swinging. It was obvious that I was in the better condition, and that if he kept at it at this rate he would tire out, and be at my mercy. That was my job, then—to make him waste his strength with these wild swings, keep out of danger and wait for my opportunity. It was very simple.

So, we whaled away at each other, Blake watching us carefully and the spectators yelling their appreciation. But this did not last long. As I had expected, my opponent began to back away from me, showing every sign of weariness, while I was fairly comfortable. I followed him, still swinging and occasionally getting home lightly. And then he backed against the ropes, his head lolling tiredly. I had him!

He wavered, his hands dropped, and I steadied myself for the final blow. Next moment came the realization that I was a second or two too late; for the other boy straightened up, and putting all his remaining strength into the blow, beat me to the punch—getting home on the point of my chin—and I landed in a quivering heap on the trampled sawdust.

But I was not out, and I felt no pain. Only I was so angry at myself for falling into so simple a trap that I could have cried.

Over me Captain Blake was counting, and his was the only voice in the cellar, except that of Brennan, who was putting up some wonderful prayer to the numerous queer deities of his acquaintance.

But I was puzzled. Why was the captain counting me out? Couldn't he see that I could get up as soon as I wanted to? Did he think I was hurt? Why, I was all right. I would just lie there for a little while, and rest up.

"Five—six."

This was absurd. And everybody watching me, and so quiet, too. Of course, I knew that a man was beaten when ten seconds were counted over him, but that meant a hurt man—I was not hurt—I could get up if I wanted to.

"Seven."

There he went again. One thing about it, the seconds seemed to be long ones, like those when one is half-asleep. But it was all rot. Surely the captain knew that the red-headed boy could'nt hit hard enough to hurt me?

"Eight."

"Barney, Barney—get up, get up!"

Oh, well, I thought drowsily, suppose I must. How often had Brennan roused me to go on deck, like this, when I wanted to sleep. Awful nuisance. But, must get up. I yawned.

"Nine."

I don't remember getting to my feet. I felt the fist of my opponent swing past my head without touching, and then the impetus of his blow carried him into me, and I clung desperately.

"Break—break," commanded Blake.

Still I hung on.

The captain tried to pry us apart.

"It's time," I shouted. "More than three minutes."

Blake pulled out his watch, and looked sternly at the saloon-keeper, who wilted under that look, and called "time." I stumbled into Brennan's arms, and was eased down upon the kindly sacks.

"So," Blake was saying, "you let the time pass. Want your boy to win, eh? After this, I'll keep time myself. A little more nerve, Briggs, and you would have succeeded—I hadn't looked at my watch for hours until just now."

I really wasn't much hurt, although I heartily wished for more than one minute rest; and when the captain, totally ignoring the saloon-keeper, called "time," I had no trouble stopping the rushes of the red-headed boy, and presently I felt that he was far more tired than I was.

But now I was not swinging—contenting myself with blocking, and waiting for a certain opening, and at last it came; the other boy dropped his guard for a moment, and I hit him again where ribs end, and he sank, groaning, to the floor, apparently all in. It happened so suddenly that it looked like a fluke, and perhaps it was, but I was not worried by that. I was too pleased to hear the captain counting over somebody else to care how that somebody came to be counted over.

* * *

BUT that boy was plucky, and when he struggled to his feet at the count of nine, I felt sorry for him. Only a few minutes before he thought he had won, and my youthful health had cheated him. Besides, his very existence depended upon his winning, while to me the fight was but an incident, an experience to remember and talk about. He staggered pathetically as he got up, and the spectators held their breath, waiting for the finish.

I didn't want to do it. I saw no reason why I should hit the poor devil again. He was a stranger to me, and, somehow, I had grown to like him. Why take away his living, then? And then I remembered Brennan's ten shillings, and the purse of three or four bob, of which I had seen no evidence.

Since I had entered that cellar, the changes of years had passed over me. I had come to understand that certain things must be done, however much we may dislike doing them, and however much we may wonder why the Absolute should allow conditions which make it necessary we should do them.

Now, it was necessary that I should reduce that red-headed boy to a condition where he could fight no more. I put up my hands.

A few feet away my opponent stood swaying on sagging legs. I made a step toward him, and then the saloon-keeper lost control of himself and deliberately pushed his foot into the ring and tripped me heavily.

It was the rottenest trick I had ever seen, and I was mad clear through. I forgot the red-headed boy, turned 'round, hearing a babble of voices, and hit the saloon-keeper in the middle of his fat face.

That was the most comforting blow I ever struck. But it had the most extraordinary results. One of those causeless panics, which occur in herds of humans and other cattle, was the consequence; and it all happened so rapidly that to tell about it is difficult.

The red-headed boy seems to have started it. Whether he thought that my striking his boss was a sort of sacrilege, or whether it was his notion of the end of the earth, or whether he knew that Mr. Briggs' temper for some hours would be a thing best avoided, and, consequently, lost his head in his haste to escape, I know not. Let it be simply told that he dived under the ropes, with more activity than I thought he had left, shouting at the top of his voice—

"Police—police—help—murder."

He forgot to shout "fire," but even with that omission the cellar cleared with startling rapidity. I seemed to hear the captain telling the saloon-keeper that he was a dirty rotter, then came a noise like a ship being dismasted in a cyclone—the disturbance of the heterogeneous collection of seats impeding a frantic audience, doubtless—and then there was nobody there but the captain, Brennan and myself. The crowd had left nothing but its odor.

"Well," drawled Blake, "what a rout—what a bally rout!"

"But what was the matter, sir?" asked Brennan, somewhat agitated.

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"You saw as much as I did. Mobs are like that, and so, sometimes, are armies."

I began to dress, feeling rather blue. If the spectators had gone, where would my purse of three or four shillings come from—presuming that my opponent's running away implied my victory? I mentioned this to Brennan, adding rather plaintively that I would not be able to buy the books I so badly needed.

"What?" broke in Blake. "Books—is it books you want? Boys don't, usually. Tell me about it."

Brennan explained with some enthusiasm, somewhat proud of his ability as an organizer, but dubious concerning his skill as a collector. Would the captain be so kind as to tell him how he was going to get his ten shillings from Mr. Briggs?

"So," answered Blake, "this boy is not your son?"

"No, sir," replied Brennan, laughing, "he's a boy on our ship. His parents are dead."

"Yes, sir," I amplified, "my father was a captain in the army, like yourself. When I was a year old, my mother and father were killed in a carriage. Mother was driving, and the horses ran away—over a cliff. I lived with my aunt till I was ten, then I ran away from her."

"What is your name, and what was your father's regiment?" asked the captain rapidly, his voice shaking.

I told him, and he put his arm around me. He was greatly agitated, and his whole body trembled. For some minutes we stood like this, silent, Blake staring into the shadowy corner of the cellar. Then, suddenly, he turned furiously upon Brennan.

"So," he said, taking his arm from me, and shaking his fist at Brennan. "So, you subjected this boy, this son of a dead lady, to this vile outrage, in order that you might win ten shillings, did you?"

Brennan hadn't looked at it in that light, and he tried to stammer some sort of an explanation, but the captain cut him short.

"It's in the mind of me to give you in charge," his Irish increasing with his anger. "It's six months with hard labor you've earned."

"I don't think he meant any harm—and I wanted to win the books," I broke in."

"Of course ye'd be loyal," he said gently. "But ye don't understand." He smiled at me, then turned again to Brennan. "Get out of here, and don't let me see your face again. You, and your dirty ten shillings. Go, now." And Brennan went, looking very shamefaced.

I was very much mystified, and not a little embarrassed and uncomfortable, as I went on with my dressing with the captain watching me—his hard, masterful eyes filled with a yearning that was painful.

"Ye may think it's calling the kettle black, I am?" he said suddenly.

I had no answer to this, for my life had told me to consider drunkenness from its funny side. Besides, in those days it was too fashionable to be frowned upon as it is today.

"But," he continued with apparent irrelevance, "don't ye believe them when they tell you that it's the bad women that send men to hell. It's losing a good one that does that."

There was a noise of argument in the bar overhead.

"I think your friend is trying to get his ten shillings," said Captain Blake. "He must want it mighty bad. By the way, what do you want most in all the world?"

"Enough to eat, a place to live in away from ships, and all the books I can read, sir," I answered promptly.

"Well, now," said the captain, "I think that can be arranged."

And it was.

# THE MADNESS OF JOHNNY DYER

## By G. A. WELLS

*Author of "The Madness of Quill McHenry," "The Rag and the Roaring Giant," etc.*

"TINY" MARKENSON was called Tiny because he was a mere slip of a fellow, weighing but one hundred and ninety pounds, and was set up like a draft horse. He also had brains and knew how to use them. Perhaps that is why the Island Trading Corporation made him its resident agent and instructed him to take up headquarters on Tamana Island and look out for its thousands of square miles of plantations on Tamana and a hundred other islands lying about in the Pacific.

While life among the natives of Polynesia is not exactly the sort of life a white man selects above all things, Markenson managed to make out. At frequent intervals excitement and adventure intervened to wipe out monotony and the drudge of routine work among the islands. Hence this story. As it opens, Markenson is seated in a deck chair on the awning-shaded quarterdeck of the auxiliary schooner *Jane Nichols* at anchor in Tamana harbor, idly gazing forward.

Presently Doctor Craig Jarvis, an excitable little man, came up the cabin hatch and threw himself wearily into the hammock stretched from the mizzenmast to the skylight. Both men were as nearly naked as civilized men dare to be and still retain a measure of their modesty; but the heat waves that danced and quivered along the unshaded portions of the deck seemed to make a mockery of any attempts to be comfortable. As the doctor sat down in the hammock Markenson turned on him with questioning eyes.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired when the other advanced no information after a reasonable lapse of time.

Jarvis fitted his big, shell-rimmed glasses to the bridge of his nose with a spasmodic twist of his slender fingers.

"What's the trouble with anybody who's fool enough to parade around in a billion horse-power sun without a hat?" he replied petulantly. "He's loony, that's the trouble!"

"Serious?"

"I tell you he's crazy!" snapped back the other.

Markenson muttered a disgruntled "Humph!" and fell to watching the rising and falling brown backs of the Kanakas as they beat the rust from a length of chain cable on the forecastle. For two solid hours the two men sat on in silence and the sun went down behind the rim of the sea and the Kanaka crew knocked off with the chain, then Markenson removed his bulky frame from the chair in which he sat and moved toward the low rail. At the rail he stopped and looked back.

"I'll be at the bungalow if you need me," he said shortly.

Receiving a curt nod in return he stepped overside into the boat moored there and pulled toward the beach a quarter of a mile away. Jarvis followed the boat with dreamy eyes until it reached the beach and its occupant disembarked and disappeared in a grove of date palms that but half concealed a spacious bungalow, then he too rose to his feet and went below to see how his patient was coming along.

Neither of the sane members of the "Trinity," as the Islands knew the three friends, could remember when one of its number had been laid low by the hand of the sun; yet there was Johnny Dyer, mechanical engineer for the corporation, lying in a bunk in the cabin of the *Jane Nichols*, talking as no sane man talks as a concrete proof that calamity plays no favorites.

He rambled on and on through the realms of fantasy, calling up stray bits of life that began at the end and ended at the beginning, which made it all very hard to understand. But no matter how far distant his hallucinations led him he always returned to the person whom he called "Edith, darling." He muttered over and over, seemingly to the girl, that it was a "blasted lie!" Jarvis, who had paused beside the bunk where the sick man lay tossing, heard and shook his head sadly. He picked up a small, silver-framed photo of a girl he found on Dyer's pillow and gazed at it long and intently, his gaze at intervals wandering to Dyer's flushed face.

Then he replaced the photo on the pillow and swore softly to himself. Jarvis had never been in love, but he knew some things not in medical books. It is better to give a man latitude in which to express his delirium audibly than to give him medicine to make him sleep and choke him with phantasmagoria, so Jarvis betook himself to his own bunk across the passageway and left his patient to fight it out.

Some time in the very early morning of the next day, before the veil-like mist had blown out to sea, Markenson was awakened from a fitful sleep at the bungalow by a tumultuous knocking on the veranda.

"What's the row?" he yelled.

"Is Johnny here, Tiny?" came a voice which the agent instantly recognized as belonging to his doctor friend.

An anxious note in the voice caused him to hop hastily from his bunk.

"What about Johnny?" he inquired, appearing on the veranda where stood Jarvis clad in very little of nothing except his glasses with their retaining ribbon streaming in a festoon about their wearer's neck.

Markenson noted that his caller was white-faced.

"Well, what about Johnny?" he demanded a second time when the doctor seemed to be lost in peering into the darkness where the *Jane Nichols'* riding light glimmered like a star on the water.

"He's gone!" the doctor burst out finally.

"What?" A scared look flashed into Markenson's eyes. "When did you miss him?"

"About an hour ago."

"You searched the schooner carefully?"

"All over—everybody searched," replied the little doctor brokenly.

"How about the boats?"

"All there except the one you came ashore in. I wonder if——"

Jarvis stopped abruptly and threw a frightened glance down toward the surf breaking softly on the beach not a hundred feet away.

"My God! Not that!" gasped the agent. "Too many sharks for swimming!"

"That's the only way to explain—" began Jarvis when a warning glance stopped him—"Blake is standing by for orders—suggests that we circle the island," he finished.

Markenson shook his head hopelessly.

"A waste of time," he said. "If he's not aboard and none of the boats are missing we've got to take it for granted that—the other, you know. The white-bellied devils!"

He, too, threw a glance toward the water, but it was more a glance of hatred than of fear.

"Get back to the schooner and have Blake fix rations for twenty men for ten days. You and Frankie bring the stuff ashore; I'll want both of you to go in one of the parties. Bring automatics for you and me. And, Jarvis," he called as the other man turned away, "better bring along a coil of two-inch manila and a grapnel; we may have work of that sort. Now hustle!"

Jarvis hastened back to the beach where he had left his boat and pulled off to the schooner, while Markenson hastily dressed and rushed off to the copra sheds to rout out the natives. By dawn Jarvis and Frankie Blue, Kanaka boatswain of the schooner, had landed at the bungalow with the provisions and other gear for an extended trip. After a hasty breakfast two parties immediately set out for the interior of the island; one party of ten men under Markenson heading northeast, the other party of twelve men under Jarvis heading northwest, both gradually shaping their course toward Big Rock, which stood near the center of the island.

ENCOUNTERING interminable toil and hardship in the reeking jungles, the two parties met three days later under the towering cliffs of Big Rock. Big Rock got its name from the fact that it was indeed no less than a mammoth rock, circular in shape, about two miles in diameter, and circumscribed on all sides by sheer cliffs from one to two hundred feet high.

"No luck," confessed Jarvis weakly when the parties met.

"And I am positive nothing escaped us but our luck was no better," said Markenson, sitting down in dejection. "But he's somewhere on the island, of that I'm sure," he declared, trying to keep his thoughts from dwelling on the monsters darting about in Tamana harbor.

"Well, where?" demanded the doctor impatiently.

"I don't know," was the forlorn reply. "We've got to keep going until we find him."

Failure in their quest made Markenson peevish, for he added—

"Are you sure you didn't skip anything?"

"Are you?" was the pointed retort.

"Well, somebody has been neglectful."

The little doctor looked at his companion narrowly and somewhat resentfully.

"Well, it's not me!" he snapped.

Just what proportions this embryo argument might have reached is a matter for conjecture, but at that moment kind Providence stepped in and saved the day. Providence was represented in the person of one of the natives who suddenly gave a shout and pointed toward a tongue of rock jutting out from the top of the cliff.

The others looked and saw a naked man standing on the tongue of rock, his hands on his hips, looking down at them with great concern. They could see his features distinctly. It was the missing Dyer. When he saw that he was discovered he emitted a whoop and swung his arm in a wide arc, and the next moment a heavy stone came crashing down into their midst.

"You fool!" yelled Markenson, dodging as the stone caromed against a boulder and went bounding away, narrowly missing one of the natives in its flight.

"Stop it!" supplemented the little doctor noisily, and scooped up a stone and threw it with all his strength at the man above.

It fell short by a good measure and called forth a derisive, taunting yell from the man on the cliff, who then disappeared beyond the edge of the cliff and they saw him no more.

Markenson turned to the natives, who were standing nearby in a huddled, frightened group, and engaged one of them in conversation. He had not gone far in his questioning when he saw that the man was cowering under an abject fear; he trembled visibly. Markenson shot a quick glance at the other natives and saw that the same was true of them; they appeared like dogs afraid of a master's whip.

The man to whom he was talking stuttered and halted in his speech and nothing intelligible came from his lips. Finally, in disgust, Markenson caught the fellow roughly by the arm and ordered him to divulge the secret he was apparently at such great pains to keep. Despite his threats, commands and entreaties, however, the agent was forced to give it up. He swore.

"He says there's no way to get up there," he said savagely, turning to Jarvis.

"Ask the beggar how Johnny got up there," returned the little doctor dryly. "I think he's a liar!"

"So do I, and we'll have to take it out in thinking."

The next several minutes Markenson spent in scrutinizing the cliff before him. Search as he would, however, his keen eyes could discover no projection or depression that might afford foot or hand hold. The face of the cliff was as absolutely smooth and flat as a wall of glass. Though he had lived on Tamana Island a matter of three years Markenson knew practically nothing about Big Rock. From what he had been able to gather from the native it was inaccessible. No one had ever been on top of it; that is, no human. Dyer was a pioneer.

Yet Markenson was certain that he had been lied to. Had he been more the brute and less the man he would have whipped the truth from a native's tongue with a rope's end; being a man he swore and sat down on a convenient boulder to think it over, his keen eyes roving constantly. Then at length he got up again and smiled to himself.

"But there is more than one way to kill a cat, Doc," he said, and at once occupied himself with the rope and grapnel brought from the schooner.

Jarvis carefully adjusted his glasses and inspected the cliff at length and in detail, then shook his head dubiously.

"It can't be done, Tiny," he declared emphatically. "Now if you had a life-saver's gun you might shoot the grapnel up there, but since you haven't—well, it can't be done, that's all."

Again he shook his head.

"Which proves that your knowledge of things is limited to anatomy," replied the other scornfully.

The little doctor muttered something about "fools in their wisdom" and sat down. With the assistance of Frankie Blue, Markenson stretched the rope to its full length along the ground, some three hundred feet, and with his sheath knife cut off about a hundred feet of the line. One end of the longer line he fastened to the "eye" on the shank of the grapnel, and one end of the shorter line he fastened to one of the three hooks of the grapnel.

He then turned his attention to a single coconut palm that stood somewhat apart from a clump of its fellows. This tree seemed to have been produced by a nature anticipating the needs of the Trinty, for it lent itself very readily to the scheme the big agent had in mind. It grew with a slight inclination away from the cliff, its base, which was about seventy-five feet distant from the base of the cliff, rooted at the very edge of a steep incline. The bole was smooth and supple, terminating in a scant clump of foliage about fifty feet from the ground.

With a satisfied nod Markenson ordered one of the Kanakas to shinny up the tree with the free end of the grapnel line and fasten it at the top. When this had been done and the man once more stood on the ground the agent led the two lines with the grapnel dangling between down the incline directly away from the face of the cliff. Then Markenson paused and looked at the little doctor and grinned.

"A catapult, eh?" said the doctor, returning the grin.

"History has a habit of repeating itself," admitted the agent proudly.

The idea was to shoot the grapnel to the top of the cliff with the spring of the palm. All hands now "tailed" on and began to haul away, Frankie Blue passing several turns of the hauling line about a convenient tree and taking in the slack as the others hauled it back to him. Foot by foot and inch by inch the supple bole of the palm bent away from the cliff until it formed a deep bow and the line was as taut as a fiddle-string.

When all was in readiness Markenson slashed the shorter hauling line close to the grapnel. The palm whipped up with a rush of wind, the long line with the grapnel at its end trailing after. Up and up went the grapnel, sailing over the top of the palm and continuing its swift flight over the edge of the cliff where it lodged.

As the grapnel disappeared a howl of terror went up from the natives, and before either of the white men knew what was transpiring the Kanakas were streaming away down the incline in the direction of the jungle a short distance away. Frankie Blue alone hesitated and was lost; the threatening glance he received from Markenson, though not sufficient to quell the uprisings of Frankie's barbarous nature, was yet sufficient to stay his itching legs.

"What the devil!" ejaculated the little doctor, who stood in wide-eyed wonder until the last of the bounding Kanakas had disappeared in the jungle.

Markenson hesitated between a laugh and an oath, the former finally mastering him.

"They're a bit frightened, Jarvis, that's all," said he laughingly. "The gentlemen with whom I conversed a while ago informed me that Buwani, God of Things, dwells atop the cliff and we've desecrated holy ground. In short, we've stepped in where angels fear to tread."

"Rats! The missionaries haven't been idle!" scoffed the other.

"To judge from this they have," was the reply. "A native can't forget his ancestral gods in a day, you know."

Jarvis dismissed the thing with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Thank the Lord, they've left us the grub," he said fervently.

BY THIS time the sun was hanging a blood-red disk in the west and they decided to let matters rest until the morning. Climbing hand over hand up a swinging rope against the face of a sheer cliff would in the light of day be a big job; after dark it would be as much as a man's life was worth to attempt it. So Frankie Blue, all ashiver from what he had seen and still expected to see, made a fire in the lee of a boulder and prepared a supper of canned beef, ship's bread and coffee.

The meal over the two whites sat puffing at their pipes and talking, then sought their couches of freshly cut leaves and slept the sleep of the just. Not so Frankie Blue; superstition and fear had put him in a state of mind where he could hardly bat his eyes without conjuring up a thousand devils to torment him. At times he felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to fly, but a glance at the sleeping form of the big agent nearby quelled the impulse. He was pretty much like a man between the devil and the deep sea, was the Kanaka boatswain—if he remained the devils would probably destroy him, and if he fled there was much likelihood of losing his soft snap as boatswain of the *Jane Nichols*.

So debating the matter with himself he sat with his knees drawn up under his chin and stared moodily into the fire. It was just before daybreak when Markenson quickly opened his eyes and looked up into the Kanaka's terror-stricken face. The agent's sudden wakening was caused by Frankie prodding him gently in the ribs.

"Come quick!" whispered the Kanaka tensely when he saw that his master was fully awake.

He started away.

Markenson, sensing something unusual, grabbed up his automatic and followed the man. At the base of the cliff the Kanaka halted and pointed upward. Markenson threw back his head and saw outlined in clear relief against the graying sky a swinging, swaying object that he could not quite identify. That it was not a man he was certain, for the thing possessed none of the general forms of a man.

But that some one was fooling with the grapnel line was plainly apparent; moreover, it was evident that the object, whatever it was, would soon disappear over the edge of the cliff. In haste Markenson threw up his automatic and emptied its contents into the rapidly ascending object. Hardly had the reports of the shots died away when a shower of fine, granulated substance came raining down.

If Frankie Blue's brown skin had been capable of such a thing it would at that instant have transformed itself to a livid white.

"The sacred meal! Buwani! Buwani!" he screamed, and dashed away yelping at the top of his lungs.

Jarvis, awakened by the uproar of the firing and the Kanaka's yelling, came rushing up.

"For heaven's sake! What's up?" he gasped, groping wildly for his glasses, which he found at the end of their ribbon and clapped them to his nose.

Markenson's answer was a disgusted grunt. Going to the fire he shortly returned with a blazing brand, and by its light stooped and scooped together a palmful of the substance that had fallen on his and the boatswain's heads. He looked at it critically a moment, then chuckled.

"Behold! The sacred meal of Buwani," he chortled, and thrust the stuff under the little doctor's nose.

Jarvis studied the white grains with a puzzled expression, then sniffed at them.

"Rats! That's rice," he asserted with conviction.

"Right, little man," agreed the other.

"Let's have the tale from the beginning," commanded the doctor tartly.

So they returned to the fire and Markenson began with the moment he had opened his eyes and wound up with the fleeing boatswain, the listener lifting his brows little by little as the narrative proceeded.

"Which means that Johnny was actually down here in camp," said Jarvis at the conclusion of the recital.

"Exactly; unless you can offer a more logical explanation for the fact that one of our grub packs has disappeared over the edge of the cliff on the end of the rope."

But as the doctor could not, or at least did not, offer that more logical explanation he suggested that as it was now growing daylight they get breakfast and make a start somewhere. They had hardly sat down to a hastily prepared breakfast, if coffee and bread could be called a breakfast, when a deep booming sound assailed their ears. Coming on them so abruptly, it was positively disconcerting.

They twisted their heads this way and that in an effort to fathom the mystery, but could make neither heads nor tails of it. It was not the booming report of a gun they were quite sure, though small cruisers frequently put in at Tamana; it possessed more the ringing qualities of a bell, yet it was unlike the sound of any bell they had ever heard. The first few notes were intermittent, each note complete and distinct in itself, then they blended into a continuous weird singing noise of great volume. In that desolation of hills and jungle it was uncanny.

"It gives a fellow the creeps," whispered Jarvis.

For fully fifteen minutes the sound continued, then died down to a whisper and finally ceased altogether. The two men finished their breakfast in silence.

"Well, the rope's gone, Tiny," said the doctor as they rose to their feet and began to lash their packs. "What now?"

"We'll look for the path," replied Markenson. "Last night's episode convinces me that there *is* a path to the top of that rock; else how did Johnny get down here?"

"Perhaps he came down on the rope," suggested Jarvis.

Markenson shook his head.

"Perhaps, but I don't think so. Going on the supposition that there is a path we'll start here and work our way clear around this blasted rock. Then if we don't find anything we'll hire a balloon and get up that way."

Therewith they threw their packs on their backs and hiked away toward the west. They had gone but a short distance, examining every inch of ground carefully, when they encountered a tangle of jungle that at first glance appeared to be well-nigh impenetrable. But Markenson swore by all heathen gods and his own that nothing short of death would balk him, to which noble declaration the little doctor nodded a hearty amen. They forged ahead. At noon they halted in a little glade, cool and inviting after the toil of the morning, and here they had dinner.

Just how it all happened Markenson did not remember; it came on him so suddenly that he did not have time to think. All he remembered was that after dinner he walked over to the base of the cliff where something had attracted his attention and stepped on an innocent mat of vines trailing along on the ground. The vines rushed up to meet him and, yelling, he fell into darkness. When he came to he was lying on his back with Jarvis leaning over him bathing his head, which felt immensely distorted and painful.

"It's all right, old man; stay where you are," he heard an anxious voice saying as he opened his eyes and looked into the little doctor's goggle-eyed face.

It requires more than a nasty fall to kill some men, however, and despite the medical man's protests Markenson sat up. He put his hand to his head and it came away stained with blood. He looked at Jarvis for an explanation.

"You tumbled down a deep, deep well, Tiny," said Jarvis, interpreting the expression on the other's face aright. "A very silly thing to do but you did it nevertheless. And inadvertently you stumbled on the very thing we have been looking for—the path. At least, that's the way it looks to me. Would you care to look at the place?"

The agent signified his willingness and Jarvis helped him to his feet and led the way to the cliff where the mat of vines lay. The doctor pushed back the vines with his foot to disclose a black rift. Markenson leaned over and looked down, but the place was as dark as a velvet pocket and he saw nothing.

"And down there I had to go and drag you out," went on the doctor, letting the vines fly back in place. "Tiny, when you're unconscious you're about as handy to handle as an elephant," he laughed.

"How in the world did you manage it?" queried the big man in amazement, eyeing the slight figure of the doctor from head to feet.

"Goodness knows—I had to," replied Jarvis. "But hold on, I forgot to say that I had the assistance of a perfectly good flight of stairs."

"What?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes, a flight of stairs. That's why I say we've found the trail at last."

"That settles it!" burst from Markenson, and he would have shouldered his pack and made an immediate start down into the "well" had not the other held him in leash.

"No, you don't; we stay right here until you are fit to travel," protested the doctor. "Haste makes waste, you know," he counseled. "We've got plenty of grub and oceans of time, so we can afford to take it easy."

"But Johnny—" began the injured man, but was interrupted by a curt gesture of the little man's hand.

"Johnny's an ass! Let him wait!"

interposed the doctor explosively. "If it wasn't for Johnny we wouldn't be breaking our hearts and backs traipsing around looking for him."

Markenson growled at the restraint, but Jarvis was obdurate and hinted broadly that his orders would be obeyed if he had to enforce them with the butt end of an automatic "over a thick head." He spoke so earnestly that the big agent smiled and gave in. They saw or heard nothing of Dyer during the next day or so. They did hear, however, sometimes at night and sometimes during the day, the weird, booming sound; but they did not connect the missing Dyer with the booming.

At the end of the third day following his tumble into the "well" Markenson pronounced himself fully recovered, and to prove the assertion he picked the doctor up bodily and threw him across his big shoulders with ease. That was sufficient proof of his fitness, so they agreed to make a start the next morning.

BY DAYLIGHT of the next day they had finished breakfast and made a torch of dry twigs; then again taking up their packs they started for the "door to hell," as Markenson expressed it. Tying back the vines at the point where the stairs began Markenson lit the torch and led the way down.

The center of the steps was deeply grooved, proving that they had been used very extensively in their day. The sides of the "well" were composed of small, smoothly-hewn stones, damp and cold to the touch, and thickly studded with niter, which glittered like diamonds in the fitful light of the torch.

Arriving at the bottom of the stairs, about forty steps in all, they found themselves looking into a dark, forbidding tunnel the height of which was barely sufficient to permit the big agent to walk upright. Into the tunnel they plunged, and at the end of five minutes they turned an abrupt curve and saw a faint light ahead. Hurrying on, they presently stepped out into the light of day.

The light was rather feeble, however, owing to the fact that it filtered in at the top of a narrow crevasse about two hundred feet long and more than a hundred feet deep. It was for all the world as if they were standing at the bottom of a tall chimney of unusual and erratic dimensions. Plainly the crevasse was the work of a terrestrial convulsion, and owing to a freak of that convulsion the crevasse could be seen only by approaching it through the tunnel or from the top of the rock.

At first glance it appeared that the way was blocked. But Jarvis, who had been looking around, suddenly caught his companion excitedly by the arm and pointed to a narrow fissure extending from top to bottom at one side of the crevasse. At regular intervals up this fissure thick iron rods had been embedded in its sides, thus forming a ladder of sorts.

"It will be like climbing a Jacob's-ladder to heaven!" cried Jarvis.

"It's the only way up," said Markenson grimly; "so let's be at it."

Jarvis, as the lighter man, elected to start first. He stepped on the bottom round of the ladder and began the ascent, testing each round of the ladder carefully before trusting his weight to it. Markenson soon followed. To the man who has not had his share of perilous feats the climbing of such a ladder up a narrow crack in the earth might present drawbacks; but to men who on numerous occasions had faced death in various guises the feat was merely one of those prosaic incidents that go with a day's work.

At last the two men stepped from the crack at the top of the rock and stood working the cramps from their limbs and looking about them. Their eager eyes beheld a scene of gorgeous beauty. They surmised that at the moment they were standing on the lip of the crater of an extinct volcano, the diameter of the crater almost equal to the diameter of the rock, about two miles. In truth, Big Rock itself was no less than the upstanding, colossal throat of the volcano.

From the lip the crater at every point on its circumference swooped sharply down to a depth of fifty feet or more, then leveled itself and flowed away, a beautiful flat plain carpeted with a verdant growth of grass, with here and there clumps and rows of bushes and trees of variegated colors. The whole appeared as a prodigious bowl, upon the inner surface of which a gigantic artist had painted a pastoral scene of surpassing beauty; and as the immensity of the picture impressed itself upon the two spectators they gasped with wonder and appreciation.

But what surprised them even more and caused further exclamations to leap from their lips was the solitary, two-story building that stood in the very center of the bowl. Moreover, from the building a thin column of smoke drifted lazily into the still air.

"Buwani!" cried the man of medicine.

"Johnny!" echoed Markenson.

They both laughed.

"Now if I were an archeologist I would say that we have discovered something valuable," went on the agent, after an interval. "Once I entertained a party of tourists here at Tamana, and among them was a Professor Dawes, who informed me that the islands in the Pacific were once component parts of an extensive continent maintaining a superior civilization."

"There's your evidence," said Jarvis, indicating the building with a nod of his head. "However, let's find Johnny; we can sift the evidence afterward."

"We haven't seen any evidence of his having a gun," said Markenson as they prepared to go on, "but that's no sign he hasn't one. Crazy men are not apt to be discriminating, so let's be careful."

They made their way to a point on the lip of the crater several hundred yards farther along, where a row of trees extended down the side of the bowl and across the plain to within a hundred or so feet of the building. Down they plunged, using the trees as concealment, and at last stood but a short distance from the building. Clearly now they saw that the structure before them was of heroic proportions.

It had the general appearance of one of the community houses of the Navaho Indians, but instead of the adobe brick and mud of the Navaho houses this building was constructed of the small stones similar to those they had seen in the "well" beyond the cliff. They scrutinized the place closely but saw no sign of human habitation except the wisp of curling smoke rising from the roof. Suddenly a rumbling boom broke the silence, and courageous though the two men were, they instinctively shrank. Jarvis whipped out his automatic.

"Hold on!" cried the agent in alarm, sweeping the gun down with a quick motion of his hand. "Don't get excited and plug Johnny, little man!"

With a shame-faced grin Jarvis replaced the gun in its holster. The boom ceased with the single stroke, but in its stead, as if to further play upon their taut nerves, there came from the interior of the building a mocking laugh. Markenson swore.

"Come on!" he said savagely.

Therewith, gritting their teeth, they marched out from the shelter of the trees and made for the building. As they went they heard the mocking laugh again, then again and again, and at last it ended in a series of croaking, derisive guffaws.

"The poor, poor devil," muttered Jarvis compassionately.

Jarvis had heard such sounds before issuing from the lips of madmen and knew of the great disaster that lay behind them. Johnny was doubtless a babbling, slobbering idiot.

Without mishap they reached the building and entered by one of the several doors on that side. They stepped inside with every sense alert, every muscle tensed and ready for instant action should occasion warrant. As men go, Dyer was not a giant, but life in the open had developed him beyond the ordinary and he was as tough as wire nails. In a scrimmage he would no doubt prove himself a wicked if not altogether triumphant adversary, so discretion was indeed the better part of valor.

By the light reflected into the building from outside the two men had no difficulty in finding their way about. The room in which they stood was spacious and bare of all furnishings, unless a rough ladder standing in one corner, which lost itself in a trapdoor affair in the ceiling, could be called furnishings. From room to room they made their cautious way, hearing no sound except their own footsteps and seeing nothing but the naked walls and floors. The place seemed to be utterly deserted.

"Up stairs," said Markenson shortly when they had looked into the last room on the ground floor.

He led the way to the room where they had noted the ladder and without hesitation began the ascent, Jarvis following closely on his heels. At the top the agent paused and thrust his head cautiously above the aperture, half expecting to feel a club come smashing down on his skull. Nothing of the sort occurred, however, and they went on up and stepped into a black void.

If the room in which they found themselves contained a window or a door it was hermetically sealed; the only light in the place came from the blotch which marked the trap-door through which they had just come, and that was negligible. The darkness closed in about them like something tangible, something that they could feel and cut with a knife. Their ears tensed to catch the faintest sound, they stood listening.

ABRUPTLY, like a flash from a clear sky, the sound came. It poured over them like a rushing river, tumbling and surging and swirling about them eddies of deafening sound, crashing and roaring one moment, the next sighing and crying into their ears like the wailing of a gale on the open sea.

*Boom! B-o-o-o-m!* It came rushing at them like an invisible, clutching hand that would choke the very lives from their bodies, smothering and suffocating them with its detonations. Beings of flesh and blood have their limitations.

Jarvis jerked his ever-ready automatic from its holster and emptied its contents into the vast wells of darkness about them, then with a cry flung the weapon from him and leaped for the ladder. When almost to the bottom of the ladder he lost his footing and fell, sprawling on the floor of the room below like a fish stranded on the beach.

Markenson followed an instant later, but more fortunate than his companion, landed right-side-up and ran blindly. Scrambling to his feet, the erstwhile dignified physician followed his big friend into the sunlight. The little doctor was, indeed, a disreputable sight.

What little clothing he wore was ripped and torn and the grub pack on his back, now twisted awry, was a wreck which permitted its contents to leak out and mark the path of flight. Over his right eye was a cut from which the blood oozed sluggishly. Nor was Markenson much better off. They were both visibly and shockingly scared. At a safe distance from the building they stopped and looked back, Jarvis fumbling for his glasses and clamping them to his nose.

A strange sight met their gaze and one not conducive to relieve their outraged feelings to any appreciable degree. Standing on the roof of the building, one foot resting on the low parapet and leaning indolently on a huge wooden maul, stood the missing man. He was looking down at his two comrades with an expression of mingled surprise and mirth. But far from being disrobed as they had seen him on a previous occasion, he was now garbed in the conventional white duck trousers and soft shirt of the gentleman of the Pacific, a wide-brimmed straw hat cocked rakishly over one eye.

"Hello there, you boobs! Were you looking for some one?" he called down after a long interval of staring.

The little doctor gulped. Surely such rational words could not issue from the lips of a madman! A further exceedingly minute diagnosis of the madman's face convinced the doctor that Dyer was perfectly sane; there was none of that wild, aimless staring so noticeable in the eyes of one mentally unbalanced. Markenson was the first of the two to regain control of himself.

"What the—" he began, but got no further; he choked with wrath and the question transformed itself into a violent burst of swearing.

Dyer laughed.

"Come up and let's talk it over," he invited. "You'll find steps on the other side of this shebang."

There was no alternative, so the two men walked around the building to the other side and found the steps as directed. In a few moments they stood on the roof. Dyer eyed them suspiciously, holding himself in readiness for flight or battle at the first signs of hostility.

"Is there anything you'd like to know, gentlemen?" queried the madman after a time.

His words were the pattern of elaborate graciousness.

"No, not a thing, we assure you," replied Markenson with biting sarcasm, but the sarcasm was lost on Dyer, who grinned good-naturedly.

"What's the meaning of this foolishness?" demanded the little doctor angrily, glaring at Dyer as if he would eat him.

"I'll let Buwani tell you part of the story," replied Dyer. "From what I've seen of this place I imagine Buwani used to have the careful attentions of a priest, but as the priest hasn't been around for a hundred years or so, I'm filling the job temporarily. Listen to what Buwani has to say."

Taking the wooden maul he held in his hands, Dyer walked across the roof to an object which the others had not before noticed, or if they had noticed it, had thought it of no consequence. The object was a gallows-like affair from which was suspended a smooth log of wood about ten inches in diameter and six or seven feet long. It swung free of the roof and much resembled a man hanging by the neck, thus heightening the illusion of a gallows.

Going up to this contrivance, Dyer swung the maul and brought it with great force against the log. The result was a deep, resonant boom that literally made the roof tremble. It was the sound Markenson and the doctor had heard the first time beyond the cliff. The apparatus was, in fact, a one-note xylophone on a large scale. Dyer swung the maul for a second stroke, but Jarvis made the intervening distance and caught his arms.

"For God's sake let the thing alone! I've had enough of Buwani!" he cried.

"I should think so," said the other laughingly, throwing the maul down. "Yet, you must admit it is a wonderful instrument, my friend; on a still day its music can be heard ten miles. The native monks in Morocco use such a device for frightening devils, though I know of a case where white men——"

A dangerous glint in two pairs of eyes warned him that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"What else, gentlemen?" he finished quietly.

Markenson seated himself on the parapet and pulled Dyer down beside him.

"Tell me, Johnny, how did you get ashore?" he inquired, his eyes fastened on Dyer's face.

"In a boat."

"No lies! There were no boats missing. How did you get ashore?" repeated the agent ominously.

"Well, then, one of the natives brought me ashore in his canoe," replied Dyer.

Thereupon Markenson looked daggers at the doctor.

"I said somebody had been neglectful!" he growled.

"And wasn't it up to you to look after the shore boats?" retorted Jarvis acidly.

Markenson snorted and ignored the slur.

"If you came ashore in a native's canoe, why weren't we told of it?" he asked, turning again to Dyer.

"That's a fair question and deserves a fair answer," replied the other after a moment's study. "You see, Tiny, I bribed one of the niggers to bring me ashore."

"Well?"

"When you get back to the bungalow take an inventory of your stock of liquor; you will find a bottle of Scotch missing. I purloined it. I promised my abductor another if he would keep his mouth shut."

"Insult to injury; with my own whisky, too," moaned Markenson.

"But," broke in the excitable little man of medicine at this point, "what's the idea for all this? Why did you sneak away? Why have you put us to all this trouble? Why did—oh, the devil—why everything? Speak?"

Then Johnny Dyer sighed a happy sigh and from his shirt-pocket took a sack of tobacco and papers. He painstakingly rolled a cigaret and lit it. Then to further aggravate his companions he leisurely puffed at the cigaret and sent delectable clouds of smoke from his nostrils.

"LISTEN, my dear friends," he began impressively. "I have done what I have done to get square with you. Perhaps your weak brains will permit you to recall that you two miserable sinners played a joke on me not so very long ago. To an Auckland newspaper you sent an article wherein was set forth that one Johnny Dyer, which was myself, was married to one of the native queens down this way. Securing a copy of the paper in which your article appeared you marked the article and forwarded the paper to a certain lady in the States. Unfortunately she believed every last word of that infamous lie.

" 'Never let me see your blackguard face again,' she told me in a letter which she wrote immediately upon receipt of your paper, and by numerous blotches appearing on that letter I was sure it cost her a great deal to write it. However, after much trouble, chiefly caused by securing affidavits from prominent people in these parts, I was again admitted to the lady's affections."

"Oh, Lord, have mercy!" groaned Jarvis.

"Yes, the Lord have mercy," said Dyer bruskly; "I have none."

"It was only a joke, Johnny," cut in Markenson lamely, trying to defend a position which he knew full well was indefensible.

Dyer laughed scornfully.

"And a fine joke it was," was his cynical rejoinder. "If you have ever been in love you'll realize what your silly joke cost me; I lived in hell for several weeks, believe me. I took a solemn oath to get even with you fellows and here you are. Not so long ago I chanced to hear our doctor friend here telling you about one of your niggers who had been bowled over by the sun. That was my clue. If the sun would knock out a nigger, what would it do to a white man? Knock him silly, eh, Doc? At any rate, it knocked me silly; at least, that's the supposition.

"Remember how I went about without my hat? It was a risky thing to do, I admit, but I had to make the evidence plain. I read in one of your medical books, Jarvis, how a man acted when he got a touch of the sun, so I did some practising to get the hang of it. Yet, my friends, it is you who were loony; not I. While you were groaning and moaning over my condition I was laughing at you."

"Detestable wretch!" rasped Jarvis.

"Detestable wretches you mean," grimly corrected Dyer. "As a climax to my supposed insanity," he went on, "I bribed a nigger to paddle me ashore while you slept. I had a few things stowed away at the copra sheds, so I got them and came up here. I took it for granted that my good freinds would not let me perish, and that you'd come seeking me. Oh, men, I had great faith in ye!"

"Naturally you knew all about the path up here and said nothing about it," said Markenson ironically.

"Certainly," responded the other quickly. "About two weeks ago I came up this way hunting and by the merest chance stumbled on that hole down by the cliff. Since I took your rope I suppose you came the same way. I fully intended to tell you about my find, but before I got back the big idea came to me. It struck me that I could use my secret to get square with you fellows.

"One thing following another, I fixed things with the native and went mad. Then I vamoosed and let you dig in and enjoy yourselves. To judge by personal appearances, I wouldn't say you've been to a picnic. 'Trouble, trouble, toil and trouble,' eh? Besides, what would your many friends think of this story?"

He paused and looked at them eloquently.

For a time after Dyer ceased speaking there was an unbroken silence, then Markenson, urged on by certain signs of approbation from the doctor, said:

"Johnny, your point is well taken. But remember what the Book says in regard to such things, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Now, in order to make amends and set you right in the estimation of this—ah—er——"

"Miss Edith," supplied the little doctor with a sly glance at Dyer.

"A-hum—this Miss Edith, yes," continued the agent, "we will, Doc and I, write her an explanatory letter fully exonerating you from all sin. Is that enough?"

The eyes Markenson turned on Dyer were so filled with repentance and contrition, Dyer was himself somewhat ashamed of his revenge. He grabbed the agent's hand and gave it a liberal squeeze, doing the same for Jarvis.

"I forgive you both," he said.

"Thanks, Johnny," came the echo.

"But it is indeed an ill wind that blows no good," spoke Dyer at length, looking out across the plain. "I've made an immense discovery in this old crater, a discovery that will have a far-reaching effect on international affairs. This crater is one huge solid deposit of sodium nitrate and sulfur, my friends. Of course, you know without being told that the former is a base for a number of high explosives and the latter is used extensively in the manufacture of common powder. What do you think of that?"

"What has that got to do with the corporation?" inquired Markenson, his keen eyes on Dyer's face in search for a hidden meaning. "The corporation has no rights here except on the plantations."

"Did I say anything about the corporation?" demanded the other. "I am thinking of something far greater than the corporation."

"Well, what?" said Jarvis, striving vainly for light.

"I am thinking of the United States Government!" almost shouted Dyer. "The United States owns every grain of these immense deposits, and when you consider that the greater part of the world's supply of sodium nitrate comes from Chili, a country none too friendly to our interests, you will realize what it means to Uncle

Sam. And the Government doesn't know that these deposits are here.

"Funny, I admit, but it's a fact. I am the discoverer of these deposits, gentlemen. The records on file merely state that Tamana is an island of volcanic origin and of little value. Oh, Lord! Of little value!"

"Bully boy!" shouted the little doctor as the full import of the thing came home to him.

"Well done, thou good and fraudulent lunatic!" yelled Markenson.

But the madman only grabbed the maul and beat on Buwani until that abused god sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" in one note.

# A LUCKY CROSS

### *by* BERT VAN

GEORGE "FRENCHY" BURGOYNE was what we called, in Montana, a cayuse-Frenchman, if there is such a hyphenated nationality. He punched cows for a living, sang songs because his nature demanded it, and grinned when somebody wanted to fight. Not that he wanted to fight, but as he said:

"When somebody she goes on de prod, dere mus' be somebody to accommodate."

George carried an old bone-handled Colt, and gained the respect of every one, when he emptied the old gun in a saloon one evening, and obliterated the features of a lithographed damsel, who knelt at a spring and advertised the wonders of a certain mineral water. The head would measure about three inches, and George was fifty feet away.

"Kid" Haley hated George. For no known reason except that George laughed all the time, while the Kid was of a sullen, morose disposition, prone to soak his system in absinthe and whisky, and their natures clashed. Haley was a bartender, and was painfully cross-eyed. He had made threats that some day he would wipe the grin off that —— Frenchman, but when George heard about it he laughed and shook his head:

"*Non.* She ees dere to steek. Dat Keed is too cross in de eye."

Came the night of a dance, and the little cow-town was in its glory. Haley was tending bar at the Eureka saloon, and getting more sullen at every drink, while George danced and sang, and leaned against the bar and drank whisky like it was water.

I had left the saloon and started for the dance-hall, when I heard the sputter of pistol shots in the saloon. A few seconds later I heard the door slam, and somebody came running down the street. It was the Frenchman, and he was choking with laughter when he caught up with me.

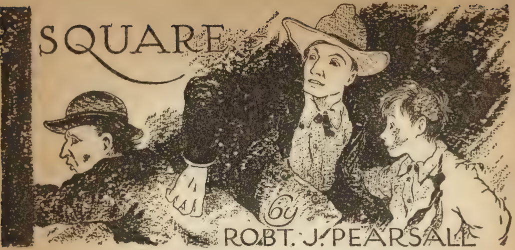
A few pistol shots more or less was nothing unusual, especially on the night of a big dance, but I knew there must have been something out of the ordinary connected with that fusillade. I waited until his joy subsided, and then inquired as to the cause for his hilarity.

"Haw, haw, haw!" he roared. "She's one good joke:

"Keed Haley shoot t'ree, four times at me, hard he could blow! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Laughable," I agreed. "Did you kill him, George?"

"*Non!* What's de use? She ees worse den death. You sabe de beeg mirror what cuts off de fron' door? *Bien.* De Keed ees so cross in de eye dat he mak' meestake which ees me, an' he shoot—out from de mirror. Now he have de bad luck seven year for sure—ver' good, eh?"



# SQUARE

by ROB'T. J. PEARSALL

*Author of "The White Moths of Vizgayan," "Danger Trail," etc.*

"YOU stand by the gang, 'kid,'" warned Buck Hendricks with portentously scowling brow. "If you do, the gang'll stand by you, see? If you don't——"

A significant snap of the fingers, eloquent in its promise of an early demise, completed the sentence.

But in truth the commandment was an easy one for Jimmy to accept, for all his young life he had been standing by any one whom he had once called a friend. Child of the streets as he was, "clouds of glory" hadn't yet ceased to trail about his boyhood; and since other forms of righteousness were rather in eclipse in his world, Jimmy had been compelled to build all his creed upon the one article of faith called personal loyalty.

He answered Hendricks suitably enough in words; but more convincing was his expansive smile, wide, beaming, trustful, and altogether trustworthy. A smile which Hendricks immediately recognized as an asset in his business, in which the appearance of friendship availed much.

When Hendricks asked him what he had done for a living Jimmy replied naively—

"Folks." But that answer was actuated mainly by a desire to please. True, a certain cleverness at craps was Jimmy's; but on occasions he had worked, too, peddled extras, carried messages, once for a whole week held a regular job in a grocery store. All in all, his had been a rather harmless existence. But it can not be denied that, knowing no home, he had become quite adept in the tricks, ruses and camouflage of the pavements, and in the various arts of getting without giving by which, according to his teaching, men acquired merit.

"In a month he'll be as fly as they make 'em," his patron assured Hendricks, who was standing at the time in the middle of his shabby office back of the bar.

Hendricks shot his cold, passionless eyes into the boy's shrewd ones, carefully scrutinized the young-old, freckled, wise face, and decided it might be true. So Jimmy, who looked fourteen and might have been eleven, was taken into the Cobweb, which was to the world of legitimate trade as the jackal to the useful beast of burden, and forthwith began his real business career.

During the next six months he learned many things well, not the least of which was the principle that anything that is easy and profitable is right, provided it is sufficiently safe. As a lookout he acquired an uncanny, intuitive ability to recognize any one connected with the police; as a runner he became acquainted with most of the habitués of the fascinating, shadowy district north of Portsmouth Square, and learned to carry cryptic, unintelligible messages without altering a syllable. Also he made wide observation of the various methods of turning drunkenness to good account; and he came to look without any particular repugnance upon Hendricks' specialty, which was that of the "knockout"—not, however, by fistic means.

One night when fog lay upon the city

like a cloak, dulling business in the dance-halls—already interfered with past all reason by some new freak ideas of the police—Hendricks drew Jimmy through the side door of the Cobweb, which opened off the office. On Hendricks' full, rather handsome, broken-nosed face was an avid, eager light, the look of a hunting animal that stalks its prey.

"You got me?" he asked, holding Jimmy for a moment in the doorway.

"I gotcha all right. The Chino's?" Jimmy flashed the ghost of his old smile on Hendricks.

"Sure. Don't make no bull, now. That dude's got a roll like an elephant's trunk, and the 'dicks' are all down Commercial Street, for a wonder. If you ain't back in twenty minutes you'll wish you were."

He slipped Jimmy a dollar.

"Now hustle."

Jimmy wasted no time in starting. Hendricks watched him disappear down the blurred street, then turned and drew the door shut behind him. The sound of blaring near-music and of shuffling feet had been coming out of the dance-hall; but the closed door shut this off, and shut the light off too, leaving only the blank, unpainted board wall, with the mist swirling against it, and dripping down.

Full of curious chances as was Jimmy's world, it would nevertheless have surprised him a little had he known that the moment Hendricks was gone a figure detached itself from that wall. It was the figure of a man, a very thin man with flapping black clothes and a paper-white face, of nervously jerking shoulders and twitching fingers—such a man, in short, as Jimmy might easily become. He hurried after Jimmy; and the flaring street light at the corner showed his mean, predatory features crossed with a look of desperate urgency.

Jimmy, his thoughts boyishly vagrant, but concerned principally with the dollar or so of easy money that might come to him from his errand, turned down Kearny Street for two blocks. Here, where the sidewalk was full of men, was a good chance for his pursuer to close up on him, and he improved it. When the two turned off into a side street, they were perhaps fifty yards apart.

This section overlooks the down-town district, which was flooded with a garish yellow light, at one end of which the ferry building pointed upward like a dully illuminated monstrous needle. But where Jimmy walked there were few open shops; and the lights from these, discouraged-looking Chinese restaurants and pawn-shops, hardly thrust back the curtain of night. The fog was so thick that what few loiterers there were seemed to be waiting in ambush, the hurrying figures loomed up suddenly and then were gone like specters, and everything seemed shrouded in the folds of mist.

But there was nothing about this that conveyed a warning to Jimmy; and presently he passed into an even more desolate street, where the ramshackle buildings seemed to have jostled each other to the point of tumbling, and there were no other passers-by at all. Here the white-faced man lengthened his stride, putting his feet down at the same instant as did Jimmy, and so creeping upon him unheard. And in the middle of a block, with a swift, noiseless rush, he pounced upon the boy, gripped his throat with one hand, and dragged him sideways into an alley and down upon the ground.

SUDDEN as was the attack, Jimmy could have cried out, but he didn't. That was another lesson he had learned at the Cobweb. Noise might bring regular assistance, but it would be more apt to bring the police, and in the forces of the law there is no redress for the lawless. So he fought like a trapped rat, squirming, wriggling, scratching.

"Where's that money? Turn over that money?" came in a hiss.

"You —— traitor!"

The demand told Jimmy it was one of his own world that had attacked him, unspeakable treachery, and what little fear he had felt was drowned in a rush of rage.

Somehow Jimmy managed to twist his head until he got his assailant's arm between his teeth, and he crunched down savagely. But the other wrenched his arm free, and ground Jimmy's face against the pavement.

"You—yer worse'n a snitch!" It was the uttermost insult.

He felt the man's hand pressing into his trousers pocket, and was suddenly worried by the thought that Hendricks' plans would be delayed, probably nullified altogether, because of his own lack of alertness.

"You petty larceny thief," he cried.

And then rescue came, just as Jimmy felt the dollar fished from his pockets. It came sauntering along the street in the shape of a man who loomed enormous in the gloom. Deftly he reached down, plucked up the two combatants bodily, and pulled them apart. He did it with gentleness, albeit with absolutely irresistible strength; and there was a certain large good humor in his first words that held Jimmy over his instinctive impulse to try to wrench away.

"Waal, waal, what's the rumpus? Dirty place to be sploshin' around in. Why, what the devil!" his tone quickly changing to anger. "I thought you was both kids. What d'ye mean, ye big——"

One glance had sufficed Jimmy to classify the man. The high boots, corduroy trousers and flannel shirt were unmistakable signs; and Jimmy knew that, had it been lighter, the broad, roughly hewn face of his rescuer would have shown brick-red from sun exposure. He was one of the large-hearted, good-natured race whom Jimmy had nevertheless learned to despise; and because he was, Jimmy voiced his appeal confidently.

"Oh, mister, he's got——"

But the gutter-man was of no mind to wait for judgment. At the beginning of the boy's wail, he had writhed sideways and twisted under the restraining arm. It was a clever dodge, devised primarily for the confusion of policemen and their ilk, and it wasn't to be expected the hand of the rustic would prevail against it. Like a shot, the fellow was off down the black alley, leaving his erstwhile captor staring stupidly after him.

But Jimmy was not content to stare. He flung after the fleeing man an entirely unexpurgated string of epithets, until the countryman put a protesting hand on his shoulder.

"Tut, tut! Them's strong words off a young belly, m'son. Not that I ain't in entire agreement, for a grown-up man that'll beat up a kid is anything you want to say. What the dickens was the matter, anyway?"

Whereupon Jimmy, realizing there were still possibilities in the situation, choked back his anger and recalled himself to the practical side of life.

"He stole my dollar," he cried as plaintively as he knew how. "I gotter have that dollar. It's for medicine, for my sick——"

"Pshaw, now, that's too bad. But a dollar ain't so much, except when you ain't got another. I reckon—there y'are."

Jimmy grinned in the darkness. Hicks certainly are easy, he reflected.

"T'ank yer," he said aloud. "I gotter pay yer back some time," he added, as the proper sort of afterthought.

The man laughed. He had a deep, real laugh, such as the gray and sordid lives of Jimmy's companions didn't seem to produce.

"You'd have one fine time findin' me, kid. What's your name?"

"Jimmy!"

"Mine's Jenkins."

Gravely he extended his hand, and as Jimmy took it, he perceived that the man was not wholly free from drink.

"I'll tell you, Jimmy, I don't b'long here, no more'n a rabbit. I live up Nevada City way, and then some, way back where the world all stands up on edge, and there ain't nothing but rocks and trees and wild things and—and God. A miner I am, placer-miner, one-man claim, but it pays. And say, kid, I'm so plumb lonesome for them old hills that——"

He waved his hand generally in the direction from which Jimmy had come.

"Seems like in town I got to have some company. But I'm goin' back in the mornin', so — d'ye really want to square this up?"

"Sure," said Jimmy, since promises cost nothing.

"Well, you just pass it along, then. When you see a fellow that ain't got no chance, like you hadn't, you just pass along any little help you can scrape up, and the dollar, too, if he needs it. That'll make it square far as I'm concerned. Will you do it?"

"I—I—sure." Jimmy was conscious of feeling unpleasantly and uncharacteristically solemn.

"That's all right, then." Jimmy was edging away. "So long."

"So long," said Jimmy. And, "So long, Hick," he flung over his shoulder as he retreated.

Probably it was perversity that made him add that last derisive word; but something else than perversity caused him to voice it so the miner could by no means have heard it.

Then Jimmy was running up the street, worried a little by the delay, but with certain other strange emotions crowding his heart, too. Promises made in such a case certainly meant nothing, but as certainly there was something about this one that clung to his mind. Maybe it was the miner's use of the word "square," since squareness was Jimmy's one rule of life. To be square to the gang—but my, how the miner had twisted the meaning of the word!

"When you see a man that ain't got no chance——"

What chance would the dude have—the dude with the plethoric bankroll in the annexation of which Jimmie's present errand was to end? The same chance that any of his predecessors had had, to be drugged, dragged out, robbed, and left to the mercy of the black alley. Jimmy thought with a rather twisted smile how quickly he could redeem his promise if he chose.

PRESENTLY Jimmy, still with his thoughts unpleasantly confused, turned into Pacific Street, hurried up that thoroughfare for a block and a half, and then into a narrow passageway. Up a certain rickety flight of steps he climbed to the second story, rapped softly on a door, and muttered a password. The door opened, he entered, and came out a minute later with a tiny bottle in his hand.

As he started down the steps he dropped that bottle, as he had been taught, over the balustrade upon a little space of soft mud that received it without a sound. He had done this many times before, supercaution it had seemed; but this time the trick served him well. For as he reached the ground a heavy hand came out from behind the stairs and gripped him.

"Where is it?"

"Where's what? Le' me loose."

"The dope. Come, quick with it."

A detective had him. A plain-clothes "dick", arch-enemy, and by Jimmy's creed despised of all true men. A muscular, middle-aged, heavy-set man, with a black mustache and a harsh and threatening voice.

"I ain't got no dope. Le' me go."

"We'll see about that."

The search was intimate and thorough, but it revealed nothing but a broken-bladed pocket-knife and a dog-eared story-book.

"What did you want with that Chink?"

"Hendricks sent me up to pay him some money, s'elp me."

"The old story," said the detective. "A lie, of course, but we can't raid every Chino joint in town. And then there's the drug-stores. See here, Jimmy." His voice changed to the cajoling note. "You'd better cough up."

"What yer talkin' about?"

"You know, all right. You're clean this time, but we've got your number. And the chief's passed the word the game's got to be stopped. You're runnin' with a smooth gang, but we'll get 'em, and you with 'em, and you're too fine a lad to go to quod. There's fifty dollars cash in it for tellin' us what you know, and a good job besides, and I'll——"

Jimmy's little frame stiffened and anger and contempt came into his voice.

"You go chase yerself. Bet yer was a —— stool yerself before——"

"Aw, I was, eh?"

Cruelty flourishes where men prey upon men and in turn are preyed upon. The detective's back-hand blow caught Jimmy and knocked him sprawling, and Jimmy, scrambling to his feet, knew he was lucky to have escaped so easily.

"Get along with you," rasped the detective. "I'll see you with nippers on, and in the reform school."

Jimmy went, reeling from the effect of the blow, and quivering all over. He went as far as the end of the alley. There he hid, and when he was sure the coast was clear, came back and retrieved the bottle. Then he ran as fast as he could back to the Cobweb.

He went through the side door into the office, signaled the bartender, and Hendricks came out.

"A devil of a fly boy you are! What kept you? But give me the peter."

His harshness didn't hurt Jimmy, however, for later he could explain the delay and win praise. And though Jimmy's head still throbbed, he rather liked to feel the throbbing. It reminded him that under pressure of fear and a bribe enormous he had kept faith. But the scene he knew was to follow inside the dance-hall drew him with an unpleasant fascination. Presently he followed Hendricks and crept cautiously—for there was a silly police prohibition against his presence in the barroom—to the end of the bar.

Try as he would, Jimmy had not yet learned to like this part of the game. He was not gifted in self-analysis, and the stirring of his not yet dead moral sense went unrecognized; but there was something about it from which he shrank. It was easy money, it was fairly safe, it was the practise of the gang, and he had accustomed himself to join in their merriment over it. But—well, Jimmy's was as yet a boy's inquiring mind, and he sometimes wondered, with all the talk of squareness, to whom the gang was really square.

Things in the Cobweb were about as usual, men and women dancing, men and women drinking, determined light-heartedness everywhere, and all sadness prohibited, except perhaps in the make-believe human heart. And Jimmy, with just the slightest cloud upon his own spirit, peered around among the tables until he caught sight of Hendricks.

Hendricks had already taken his seat and was beckoning a waiter, affability personified. There were three other men at his table; two of them Jimmy knew as Hendricks' usual confederates in affairs like this, "Red Sam" and McCarthy. But the intended victim sat on the other side of Hendricks, and Jimmy could see only his forearms, lying loosely on the table.

But at sight of those forearms Jimmy started. Clearly the program had changed in his absence, for they were not the forearms of a dude. They were heavy, powerful, and roughly garmented—and then Jimmy gasped, for Hendricks had moved in his chair, and the face of his prey was revealed.

The waiter was coming with the drinks. On Hendricks' face was a smiling mask; he was talking smoothly, jocularly, entertainingly, as he knew so well how to talk. And —no, there could be no mistake—the man who listened to Hendricks with a broad smile of good-fellowship on his sunburned face was Jenkins, the stalwart miner.

Jenkins, the man who had rescued Jimmy and befriended him without need, the man whose hearty voice and wholesome words still rang in Jimmy's ears and stirred his heart. Jenkins, who had made possible the success of Jimmy's errand, and by that act made possible his own undoing.

And Jimmy? Jimmy's face whitened, tautened. His eyes widened, his lips parted as though for a warning cry. And then a dark angel whispered in his ear, and he grinned.

A joke it was, the finest joke the Cobweb had ever known. The jest of a man being hoisted by his own petard, being poisoned by the draft which his own money had bought. Such a fine humorous sense had Jimmy's gang given him—and to an understanding heart the smile on Jimmy's face would have been sadder than any tears.

A comic twist to the little drama of the night—but, still grinning, Jimmy found himself coming forward between the tables, and as to the force that impelled him to do this he could not have given a guess. What was it the miner had said?

"When you see a man that ain't got no chance——"

THE waiter placed the foaming glasses. He placed them with careful carelessness, the miner's glass well to his right, almost before Hendricks. He placed them so that Hendricks had only to lean forward, and the miner's glass would be hidden from the man who was to drink it. And then. . . .

Jimmy remembered that in the dark alley he had given the miner his hand. But the gang were Jimmy's pals. The grin had quite faded from Jimmy's lips by now.

"A man that ain't got no chance!"

Drugged, dragged out, robbed, and left lying like a corpse, all in the name of friendship, in pretense of caring for one suddenly overcome by drink—that was the chance that would be given the miner. Then in the morning the terrible awakening. Money gone, brain muddled, the horrible reaction of drug and drink upon him, memory of this present scene like an incoherent nightmare—what chance would he have even then for redress against men who could buy alibis with their cigars?

Jimmy saw a tense, alert look flash into the eyes and across the smiling faces of McCarthy and Red Sam. He saw Hendricks bend over to the miner's ear in a confidential whisper, and raise his right hand swiftly. In the palm of that hand lay the tiny vial of deadly chloral hydrate. At that all the good that still lived in the boy roused itself in one last passionate appeal—the appeal of a terrible memory.

To be dragged out, robbed, and left to lie like a corpse! Jimmy remembered one victim of this most humorous game that had lain like a corpse indeed. He remembered the shuddering fear of the gang at the sight of the black headlines next morning. And then he did that which seemed to him, in the doing, to be unreal and fantastic as a dream.

Past two crowded tables he leaped, and, just as Hendricks' hand poised itself above the miner's glass, Jimmy caromed with all the force of his young body against Hendricks' elbow. And he saw the thin, colorless liquid spill itself, not into the miner's glass, but upon the table.

With the sickening knowledge that his world was wrecked, Jimmy saw the miner, perceiving in a glance what had been about to happen to him, spring to his feet.

"Damnation!" cried Hendricks, and then the miner struck him in the mouth.

From all sides men came running, for the most part friends of Hendricks. Chairs and tables crashed over in a general pandemonium. McCarthy swung at the miner, missed him; but Red Sam gripped him about the waist. The miner seized an empty beer-glass.

"Dey'll kill you, Hick," cried Jimmy. "Dey'll kill you."

The out-of-doors man, swiftly aware of his peril, shattered the rim of his beer-glass with one blow on the edge of the overturned table. The resultant ragged, projecting edges made it a terrible weapon. He raised it against Red Sam's face, and the man released him and leaped back.

The miner whirled and sprang toward the door. Jimmy, who had hovered on the outskirts of the group, started after him. Hendricks tried to reach Jimmy with his fist, but the blow fell short. Half-way to the door the miner checked himself, and, seizing Jimmy, pushed him ahead of him into the street.

He flung the swinging-doors back with such terrible force that the foremost of his pursuers were knocked off their feet. But there was no need of that. Once in the street they were safe enough. Provided they kept out of the shadows they were safe. The miner, with one arm flung about Jimmy's shoulder, started down the middle of the street.

But what was this? Jimmy's shoulder was quivering under his touch. The boy was sobbing.

"It's all right, kid, all right, Jimmy," the miner said, reassuringly.

But to Jimmy it was not all right. It was, indeed, all wrong. For to him who had periled his life to save the man who had succored him had come the unutterable loneliness that only an unprotected boy can feel, and not unfounded fear of the vengeance of the gang that had been his, and, worst of all, remorse. And he answered with something like a curse.

Puzzled, the miner questioned him.

"What's the matter? Everything's all right. And that was the gamest thing, the squarest thing——"

"Square!" cried Jimmy, thinking angrily that for this stranger's sake he had crossed his only friends and trampled his one creed into the mire. "Square! The —— it was!"

But an hour later Jimmy was seated on a bench in Portsmouth Square with a man who was no longer a stranger. They had talked of many things—the miner had got a pretty clear idea of Jimmy's life and the shadows through which his soul had wandered—but principally they had talked of the crooked trail of the man who would be square to those who are square to no one else. And the end of their talk was this:

"Listen, Jimmy," said the miner. "Maybe you saved my life tonight, and maybe not; but anyway, it ain't any reward I'm offerin' you. It's darn lonesome up there in the hills, and I sure would like you to say yes. You better come with me, out where the birds sing and the trees grow, and there ain't nothing in earth or heaven you need to be square to—except just the whole world."

Jimmy, in whose mind a vision of a new life had already begun to unfold, could only reply faintly—

"You—yer kiddin' me."

"Am I?" said the miner. "We'll see."

And so Jimmy, waif of the streets, came out into the world of larger loyalty.

# FOR THE FLAG

## A FOUR-PART STORY, PART THREE

### by THOMAS ADDISON

*Author of "The Boss of Powderville," "G-2 Defective," etc.*

***The first part of the story briefly retold in story form***

FATE pulls the strings of human destinies and the puppets at the ends of them move in ignorance of the force they are elected to serve.

Such a victim was James Perry, Jr., of Norfolk, Virginia. Convalescing from pneumonia he sailed South and landed at Cortina, the seat of Government of Zanhoria, Central America, the early part of April.

By a darkened bedroom window in her home in the Calle Dolores, Winifred Brewer stood looking out across the public park. It was eleven o'clock, the hour of retiring. A man's white-flanneled figure loomed in the rays of a street lamp. As he passed a poinsettia thicket a hand shot out. The man fell. Hands dragged the body swiftly into the bushes.

Screaming, the girl ran downstairs, and out into the street. She did not stop for her father, who, alarmed at her outcry, had appeared in the hall below. In the street Winifred ran into Enrique Segovia. Together they searched the park and found Jimmy Perry prone under some bushes. Perry's head was bleeding from the blow. He had been robbed.

In Walter Brewer's home Jimmy's wound was treated. He introduced himself to his host and rescuers. Leaving the house, Enrique asked Jimmy if the latter remembered reading of a William Bowman, a Richmond real-estate dealer, who had absconded recently with a quarter of a million dollars. Jimmy did.

Apprehended by the police, Juan Lopez, Jimmy's assailant, disclosed information that led officials to believe the Germans were trying to cause trouble between Zanhoria and the United States. Jimmy and Enrique planned, with the aid of officials, to checkmate the conspiracy.

Intent on calling on Miss Brewer, Jimmy was told she and her father had deserted the house in the Calle Dolores.

AT THE Banco Nacional, Jimmy and Enrique conversed with Señor Morales, the bank president, and were introduced to Miss Mary Taylor, a traveler and author. Miss Taylor was the guest of Señor and Doña Morales, having just arrived from Guatemala.

Mopping the perspiration from his face, Señor Morales flipped from his pocket a card, bearing the letters "D—VIII—K." Jimmy picked it up and returned it to the banker.

From the bank, Jimmy went to the American Legation to call on the Hon. John Henry Lane, United States Minister to Zanhoria.

Closeted with the minister Jimmy asked him to send in the official code to Washington a letter to his father. Mr. Lane granted the request. Jimmy explained what he had learned about the German conspiracy.

In the street again, Jimmy saw Winifred Brewer drive by in an automobile and stop at a pharmacy. He hastened to her and petitioned her and her father's assistance to foil the German plot. She pledged herself to the cause.

The Brewers' new home, she told Jimmy, was at the Rafael Fernandez hacienda on the Santa Maria Road.

Shortly after President Wilson made his speech, prior to the United States' declaration of war on Germany, Jimmy, Enrique, Don Luis Valera, Secretary of State, and Don Emilio Ortega, State Superintendent of Police, questioned Lopez about what he knew of the conspiracy.

Lopez told of secret meetings of five mysterious men at Señor Morales' home. From his description one of the conspirators was recognized as Herr Adolph Kaufman, the German minister. At this juncture, Jimmy told of the card bearing the letters "D—VIII—K."

"Ah!" said Enrique. "It is simple. D stands for Domingo (Sunday). Thus, Domingo—the eighth—Kaufman. Kaufman writes to Morales from Arraca and sets a date for their meeting."

Arraca was a German lumber camp on the Rio Negro River.

Zanhoria's sympathies, Señor Valera explained, were with the United States, and the German scheme was to overthrow President Hurango of the republic and place a German sympathizer at the head of the Government. By this means, Kaufman hoped to foment revolutions in Central America and thus divert a part of the United States' forces from her allies abroad.

The proposal to kidnap Kaufman was then made by Jimmy. He called on Brewer to obtain the use of the hacienda as a prison for the German minister. Brewer consented. While on the way to the hacienda, Jimmy met Mary Taylor, who broached him for a ride in his automobile. He declined gracefully.

Driving away from the Brewer place, Jimmy passed Miss Taylor, out riding in Señor Morales' car. She nodded to the American.

"I lied to her and she caught me," wailed Jimmy as he sped toward Cortina.

SEATED at a table in the dining-room of the Europa, Cortina's hotel, were Billy Smith and Jimmy. An automobile bearing Miss Taylor and Segovia stopped at the entrance.

"Ha! I know that girl," exclaimed Billy, pointing at Miss Taylor. "I ran across her at the Gatun Locks Sunday."

"You must be wrong," replied Jimmy, "the newspaper *La Cronica* says she just arrived here from Guatemala."

Later in the afternoon Kaufman and several reservist officers of the German army were quartered at the club-house at Arraca. Kaufman was talking. He said:

"Señor Morales has been ordered to call his committee Sunday night for a final consultation. After that we shall hear from General Peralta and then strike. On the night of the designated day Captain Karsch will seize the cable station at Puerto Mono and cover Peralta's landing with machine guns. We shall take Cortina by surprise under cover of darkness. Our U-boat will attend to the Zanhorian navy."

That evening Kaufman returned to Cortina to meet Miss Priez. After he left Arraca the following telegram was sent to Cortina:

> Look for package on Arraca train tonight.

The next day Mrs. Rebecca Isaacs of New York, who said she was searching for a lost uncle, visited the German legation.

Then came to the Europa, Segovia with news that a State paper had been stolen from Luis Valera's office. He and Jimmy hastened to the office. There evidence was adduced proving that Segovia and Miss Taylor had been the only two persons in the room before the paper had been missed.

Suspicion was fastened on Miss Taylor, which Segovia resented. While at the conference Señor Ortega received the Arraca message.

An unsigned message also was received by Señor Ortega the following day. It stated that there was a secret wireless plant at the German legation, and one at Arraca also.

While standing in front of a renting-agency in the Calle Grande, Mrs. Isaacs saw Miss Taylor drive by in an automobile. She signaled the driver to stop and then advanced to the running-board of the car. She and Miss Taylor talked for several minutes.

After a call from Jimmy at the American legation, Lane announced that Billy had resigned.

Jimmy and Billy were at the hotel when a messenger arrived with the news that Enrique had been injured in an encounter and desired to see Jimmy.

"We'll go," declared Jimmy. "Come on, Billy." And the two slipped into the street where a car awaited them.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### KIDNAPED

A CLOSED car awaited them. The door opened as they approached.

"Step in, Jimmy," said a voice from within.

It was Ortega's.

The two entered, and the machine glided away. Where they were going neither knew nor asked.

"What is this about Enrique, Don Emilio?" inquired Jimmy anxiously.

He was not quite certain that he had interpreted the summons aright. The superintendent laughed reassuringly.

"Not a word of truth in it, Jimmy. An excuse to get you out. Enrique is by this time on the roof of the Valdera warehouse in the rear of the German legation. The party-wall extends four feet above the roof, an excellent screen for him." He held out his hand to Billy. "Good evening, Mr. Smith. How are you, sir?"

He retained the boy's hand a shade longer than the occasion seemed to require. Billy sensed the reason.

"If it's not just steady, sir, it's not

nerves. It's excitement," he said apologetically. "I'm a little tuned up, that's all."

Ortega released his hand, smiling to himself.

"You'll do," he remarked. He went on, very seriously now. "I want to say briefly that this enterprise you are engaging in is attended with a danger I won't attempt to minimize. If you fail Kaufman will invoke all the power of his Government to have you punished, unless he takes the law in his own hands and shoots you down in your tracks. He is a resolute, violent man, and he would kill you, I believe, without the slightest hesitation."

"I wouldn't blame him," said Jimmy coolly. "I would do it if any one tried to get away with me."

"If he isn't good we'll spank him," put in Billy gleefully.

Don Emilio, mightily pleased, noted that the pair was not even considering the possibility of failure.

"We are stopping. Where are we?" queried Jimmy.

"A patrol-box. I am going to telephone. Just a moment, boys."

Ortega stepped out. Jimmy took a look around from the door, but he could not determine in what part of the city they were. The superintendent came back. He gave a direction to the driver, and the machine darted off. Soon it was going at express speed. There was none to forbid, for the body of the law sat inside and ruled. Ortega spoke.

"Herr Kaufman's limousine has left its garage in the Calle Rosario with lights out. Three minutes ago. The minister is in it. He took the Avenida Corona. That means that he will come out on the Santa Marta Road, travel south, turn east over the Arroyo Rebelde, and so into the Avenida Alejanrino."

"And then?" Jimmy shot the question at him.

"One of three things must happen after Kaufman enters the house. Otto Stoll, the chauffeur, will turn back over the bridge and drive around for a fixed time; or he will go east on the avenue in the same purpose; or he will wait in front of the house until Kaufman comes out. I don't think he will do the second. He will probably do the first. Yet he may do the third. It is late, it is dark, and there are no houses near."

"And if he does the first or the second?" interrogated Jimmy.

"He will be stopped. A drunken man will stagger into his path. There will be trouble—a fight. Both will be arrested and locked up for the night, and you will get possession of the car. But if Otto waits at the house it is not so simple. A commotion will bring Kaufman out."

Billy caught him up.

"And there's where I'll come in. You take care of Otto, and I'll meet Kaufman with a story to account for my being at the wheel. He doesn't know me."

Ortega lifted the curtain at his side and peered out. A street-lamp flashed by, and they were again in the dark.

"This is the Avenida Bella Vista," he informed them. "It is just south of the Avenida Alejandrino, and is built up only a short distance. We have passed the last light. We shall come presently to an open field—ah, we have reached it!"

The car slowed down. It turned off to the right, bumped along a few yards, and came to a stand.

"We will get out here," said Ortega.

The car had brought up midway of an unpaved, weed-choked street that formed a connecting-link between the two avenues. Trees lined it, but there were no buildings. Ortega addressed a few words to his driver, after which, with a low "Come" to the boys, he struck off diagonally across the field to his left. Jimmy and Billy followed. Billy held the box of cigars clutched to him.

THEY came at length to the grove of conifers that fronted Morales' house on the south side of the avenue. As they plunged into it a man stepped out from the shelter of a tree. Jimmy's hand went to his pistol, but he saw that Ortega was not disconcerted by the apparition. He advanced to the man and held a short conference with him. At its close the man slipped away into the darkness. Ortega returned.

"It is all right," he said. "We have arrived in time."

"I say, Don Emilio," submitted Jimmy, "suppose those others come—the rest of 'the five'? We can't wait in front of the house for Kaufman if they do."

"Move to this side, and say nothing," Ortega replied. "My men will take care of the other cars. But I've really no hope of such good fortune. Herr Kaufman doesn't want a debating society on his hands tonight. He will tell Morales what to do, and Morales will pass the word along." He added: "Miss Taylor went out early in the evening, and has not returned. She was walking."

"What do you think of it?" Jimmy asked him.

"I'm not thinking. I shall have a report on her later. She was followed."

They were quiet after this, standing well back among the trees, their ears strained to catch what sound the night might bring from the west. The bell of La Caridad beat distantly on the still air. Twelve o'clock. A while longer they stood.

*"Ola!"*

It was Ortega calling attention to a shape looming in the street. It came nearer, purring gently, and stopped directly across from them. A smaller shape detached itself from the larger and moved toward the house. They could hear the soft tapping of leather on stone accented with a curious regularity—*tip-tap, tip-tap*. The house-door opened, and a man's figure was revealed in the faint light of the hall. Then the door closed.

A *bur-r-r* came from the machine. It moved off, described a half-circle, and went west.

"Quick!" hissed Ortega to the boys.

He raced through the trees, running in a divergent line from the street. When he was out of the grove he waved high above his head an electric-torch three times. But he did not check his steps, and they went on till they came to the intersecting by-way. Their car was already there in response to Ortega's signal. They tumbled into it, and sat panting for breath.

"What are we waiting for?" gasped Jimmy as the machine throbbed under them but did not stir.

"To give the others time. We don't want to come up until they have taken Otto away."

For five minutes by Ortega's watch they stayed where they were. Then—

*"Vayase!"* he barked at the man in front.

It was at the east end of the bridge that they came upon the limousine. A man saluted as they drew up. Ortega exchanged a few hurried words with him, and they got out into the road.

"Stoll kicked up a row, but they quieted him," said Ortega grimly. "Can you manage this machine of Kaufman's?" he asked of Billy.

"Sure. I can drive it in my sleep."

"Try it out—over the bridge and turn. You haven't many minutes to spare, it may be."

Billy jumped into the driver's seat.

"'Ware there!" he cried to the man in the road.

He switched on the head-lights for the bridge, crossed it, and tore into the night.

"Jimmy," said Ortega gravely, "it all rests with you now."

"Right you are, Don Emilio," Jimmy rejoined cheerfully. "Don't worry. You'll hear from me before day. Where shall Billy leave the car?"

"Some one will be waiting here for it. Don't let Mr. Smith delay. I shall want to know how you got along."

Billy was coming back. He shut off his lights after crossing the bridge, and came to a stop.

"Runs smooth as silk," he remarked. "I haven't forgotten the cigars, Jimmy. They're on the seat with me." He sniggered mischievously. "I hope our guest will like the brand."

The policeman standing near muttered something to himself. Cigars! They were thinking of in a time like this, these Americans!

"You must go," said Ortega. "Good luck, my friends. I will stay here till you pass. Should anything happen that you can't control fire one shot. I will come, no matter what the cost."

He wrung their hands. Jimmy got in, and Billy let the car slide easily away. He made a turn when he came to Morales' house, and came up to the walk headed for the bridge. A dim light showed over the door; otherwise the place was dark for all they could see. At least fifteen minutes had passed since Kaufman entered the house. He might not issue from it for half an hour—an hour—longer even. It was this uncertainty, the delayed action, that bore heavily on the two. One thing, however, seemed assured. There were to be no other visitors this night.

They talked in hushed tones, Jimmy detailing to Billy the procedure he had determined on. Then he pushed the door open noiselessly, and squatted on the rear seat next to the walk like a frog ready to leap.

From the heart of the city after a time came the sentinel call of the great church-bell. One stroke.

"Is that one o'clock or half-past twelve? It seems a year," whispered Billy.

"The half-after," Jimmy answered.

They fell silent again. Jimmy stretched himself out on the seat to ease his stiffened legs. The minutes passed. Again the clock boomed.

*"Tsit!"* Billy gave a warning sound.

The house-door was opening.

Jimmy cautiously drew himself up to his former crouching posture, every nerve taut as a fiddle-string. The door closed, and the limping-tap of leather on stone followed. Kaufman was coming to his car. He was muttering to himself in German, angrily it seemed. Something had gone wrong with him.

His short, paunchy form was at the car now. His foot was on the running-board. His head came in at the door, then his shoulders, stooped to clear the lintel. His eyes were directed to the supposed Otto sitting at the wheel. He was in the act of giving him a command when one hundred and fifty pounds of solid beef and bone crashed down on his neck and flattened him to the floor. At the precise instant the car started off, the door swinging wide, and the Imperial German envoy's feet kicking the air outside.

"Easy as two and two," crowed Billy softly.

JIMMY snapped on the ceiling-light. He had one minute in which to do the work he meditated. Kaufman's wind was knocked out of him, but he would be getting it back, and the trouble would begin. Jimmy felt for one of the German's hands, found it, jerked it rudely up over his spine, and slipped it into the noose of a stout cord he had laid out carefully on the seat in advance. He found the other hand and bound it securely to the first.

"Hey, what's the matter?" he yelped at Billy, and snapped off the light.

The car had stopped at the bridge. Billy spoke to some one in the street. His voice was coolly urgent.

"Shut that door, please. We've got a sick man inside."

The Imperial Minister was shoved ungently on his nose to the farthest limit of the floor, and the door closed against his protesting feet. Kaufman bellowed in inarticulate rage, crazed with the misadventure that had befallen him.

They passed the cane huts that fringed the city, and took up the Santa Marta Road. Jimmy switched on the ceiling-light again. He bent over Kaufman and exerting all his strength raised him, and plumped him into the seat-corner. This accomplished he ran his hand over his captive's person, and when it came away there was a neat hammerless in it. The man kicked at him. His heavy-lidded eyes shot out venomous sparks. Spittle slimed his beard. A great guttural oath broke from his snarling lips.

"What did he say?" Jimmy asked Billy.

"I'd hate to tell you," grinned the boy.

He spoke to Kaufman in his own tongue. A duel of words followed, and suddenly ended. Kaufman had regained in a degree his self-control and he had found his English. He delivered it at Jimmy.

"You shall answer for this, you scoundrel! Both of you. And bitterly. My person is sacred. I represent his Imperial Majesty, the Kaiser, at this capital."

"I wish," said Jimmy evenly, "you were in actuality that infamous man. Fortunately for yourself you are not."

"I've told him he's a prisoner of war," offered Billy; "that he has conspired against the Government of the United States; and that until we have dug up all the deviltry he has set agoing he won't see his happy home again."

"Bah!" spat out Kaufman. "The city will be aroused tomorrow. You will be apprehended, punished. I shall see to that. You—release my hands! I command you!"

Jimmy gave him a cold smile.

"You don't seem to take us seriously, Herr Kaufman. You will do so later. That is all I have to say to you now."

He settled himself in his corner with the minister's own pistol resting lazily in his hand, and ignored the flow of threats directed at him. They ceased shortly, and only the hum of the big machine devouring the miles disturbed the silence.

The dipping down of the car told Jimmy that they had come to the ravine on the other side of which lay the farm. Billy put the car across the shallow stream with due care, and swung through the ruined gateway. Jimmy looked at the time. It was a few minutes of half-past one.

"Give them the horn," he bade Billy. "They will know what it means."

Billy complied, and when the car swept out from the trees on to the plateau before the house the headlights threw into relief the little group waiting for them at the door. Walter Brewer stood in advance of his daughter, his thin form drawn up erect and alert. Back of Winifred, to one side, the huge frame of the negro Sam was lined against the gray front of the building. Jimmy jumped down from the car. Billy followed.

"Here we are, sir," Jimmy said to Brewer. "This is my friend and fellow-American, Mr.——"

"Better not!" cautioned Billy.

"Mr. Blank," finished Jimmy.

Brewer understood. He came forward, and peered into the automobile.

"You have him? Ah—yes—I see."

"Will you descend, Herr Kaufman?" inquired Jimmy pleasantly.

An oath was the response. Kaufman did not move. Jimmy's face set sternly.

"There is a lady with us, Kaufman," he said. "I will advise you—this once only—to guard speech in her presence."

"Sam, I want you," called Brewer, and when the negro, running, was come to him, he said: "Bring this man in. You know where to place him."

He led the way to the door. Here the boys paused, and came to a salute. Over the entrance was draped the starry banner of their country. Billy passed in with Brewer, but Jimmy detained Winifred.

"This is splendid of you!" he exclaimed, pointing to the flag. "I had not thought of it. It is the one thing needed to convince this brute German that in entering here he has Americans to deal with."

Her dark eyes were raised to the silken folds.

"I brought it from home," she murmured. "But it was father who placed it there. I wish you could know what this change in him means to me."

She went in rather hurriedly.

Jimmy heard Sam's voice raised persuasively to the solitary occupant of the car, and he tarried for an instant.

"Dey ain't no use er bringin' trubbel on yerss'f, mister. 'Tain't fur yer got ter go. Jes' a step er two. De queschun 'tween you an' me is, is yer gwine ter walk it or is I got ter tote yer? Hit's one er tuther, an' I ain't partickler which."

What Kaufman's reply was Jimmy could not catch; but he saw Sam reach into the car. Kaufman came forth in his grasp, and was headed for the house under forced draft, as a sailor would have termed it.

Jimmy grinned to himself, and passed in.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CITY

THERE were strange happenings in Cortina on this same night. In the early hours of the evening— at forty minutes after eight, to be exact—Miss Mary Taylor slipped secretly out of the house in the Avenue Alejandrino, and walked rapidly in the direction of the Calle Central. She was supposed to be writing letters in her room; she had in fact, given out that she would be so engaged for at least two hours.

If her absence was discovered meanwhile she would account for it in some offhand way—a little stroll in the near neighborhood to rest her after her labors with her pen. Doña Natalia, simple soul, took her for an eccentric anyway, and Don Manuel knew her for a self-reliant person amply able to look out for herself in dark or day.

Miss Taylor had good reason for her secrecy this night. Mrs. Isaacs had supplied her with the reason and after weighing it to a nicety, she was convinced that it was sound and valid. They must confer together without delay. She walked on engrossed with her thoughts, and gave only an unafraid glance to the shuffling *mestizo* she overtook on her way along the avenue. The man's gait quickened the least bit when she passed him. When she reached the Calle Central he was but fifty feet behind her. He lit a cigaret with an erratic flourish of the match, and continued at a much slower pace.

Miss Taylor turned south on the Calle Central. A man loitering across the street had seen the brandished match, and loafed along toward the south. The suppositious half-breed retraced his steps up the avenue. It was his beat for the night.

Miss Taylor pursued her way and her thoughts. She was casting over again her interview with Mrs. Isaacs that afternoon. She was, in final review, summing up each word, each look of the little woman. They were, she decided, in harmony throughout, and crowning all was one indisputable fact certified to by Morales when, on his arrival home before dinner, he had given her an account of Mrs. Isaacs' call on him in the morning. Yes, beyond doubt, it was wise to keep this rendezvous.

She began questioning the street names at the corners, for she was drawing near to the Calle Dolores. She came to it with the next block, followed it east until opposite the park, found the number she had been given and, as instructed, tapped lightly on the door. Mrs. Isaacs herself responded to the knock.

A moment afterward the man loitered along. He made a swift examination of the premises at No. 140, and lounged over to the park. He glanced about, and moved a bench from one of the paths into the deep shadows of a clump of shrubbery. There were but a few persons passing through the park. The number grew less as time went by, and finally the place was abandoned of all save the concealed watcher on the bench.

The night was warm and still, and the man yawned wearily more than once. La Caridad struck ten, then the half-hour. The house gave no outward sign of life. The man caught himself nodding now and then, and straightened up; but he nodded again and again, and at length his head fell forward on his breast and stayed there.

At 10:50 the door of No. 140 opened, and an insignificant little figure stepped out. The door was shut noiselessly. It could be opened only from the inner side unless one was provided with a latch-key. Mrs. Isaacs flitted off in the dark toward the Calle Central where she hoped to find a cab.

Eleven o'clock from the cathedral bell dinged its way into the consciousness of the man on the park-bench. He roused guiltily. He had slept for twenty minutes. What had happened in the meantime? He was in for a grilling at the central office if the woman he had followed had slipped him.

As he looked he saw that the thin strip of light he had noted below the drawn window-shades was gone. And so was the woman, it was probable, unless—another thought—she was spending the night there. He crossed over to the house. The street was deserted, and he resolved on a bold expedient. He advanced to the door and rang the bell. He could hear it shrilling somewhere in the rear. It went unanswered. He tried the door softly, and rang again—three times at half-minute intervals. There was no response. The man cursed at himself.

"They sleep well, these people," he muttered. "Either she is gone or she remains till morning." He reflected a moment: "Two women! There would have been leave-takings. Always there is that. And I would have heard. I was but nodding. She rests here for the night. It is a certainty. I will wait and see. Twenty minutes only. Pah! And two women! My skin is saved."

He hugged this comforting assurance to himself, and returned to his vigil on the bench resolved to stick it out till morning, and note who should come forth from this devil's hutch constructed solely to keep an honest man from bed.

Inside the house Miss Mary Taylor lay stretched out on a couch in the living-room sunk in a soundless sleep consequent on a glass of claret she had swallowed when making ready to take her departure. The wine was to have fortified her against her walk home. Mrs. Isaacs, in sisterly comradeship, had drunk of it with her, though without untoward results it appeared.

The bosom of Miss Taylor's dress gaped open in unseemly fashion. A small pearl grip pistol lay on the floor beside the couch. A jeweled bracelet-watch encircled her wrist, and a ring of value her finger. One might have imagined that a pillaging-hand had been busy with the young woman's toilet, and yet, strangely enough, had spared an obvious loot.

* * *

ON THE party-wall between the Valdera warehouse and the German legation was a broken weather-beaten soap-box. Some one had carelessly thrown it up on the wall at a forgotten period and there, a worthless derelict, it had persisted ever since. Enrique Segovia hailed the box as a boon. Its coverless top faced him, and through a rent in the bottom he could command the legation roof, his head sheltered as by a hunter's blind.

Not fifteen yards distant was the flag-pole. Five yards farther on the breast-high parapet was outlined to his eye. The flagpole rose thirty feet above the roof well over the surrounding buildings, and was supported by guy-rods from midway its length.

It was a long, soul-harrowing wait Segovia had to endure, for it was not until the quarter-hour after twelve that any move was made within the enemy's terrain. He had been sorely tempted to go over and cut down the pole out of hand, but decided against it. They might find other means of raising the antenna, and his work would go for nothing—he would not have another chance at the wireless. They would see to that.

But now at last his patience was rewarded. The scuttle opened, and two men appeared. They spoke in German, not loud, yet with no great suppression of voice. It was plain that fear of eavesdroppers did not disturb them. One of them walked to the parapet and peered into the street. The other came toward the party-wall. Segovia guessed, from his square-cut figure, that it was Gustave Landeker, for he knew the legation attachés by sight.

He crouched and held his breath, feeling for the rubber-covered handle of the hatchet in his belt. But Landeker, or whoever it was, gave a perfunctory survey of the warehouse-roof, and went back. The other man had returned to the flagstaff.

Segovia was up again viewing them through his box. He saw them lift a board off what seemed to him a long wide slit in the roof; he saw them loosen the guy-rods and unstep the pole as they would a mast and lower it through the opening; and after ten minutes more or less he saw the pole rise, the men lay hold of it, and grunting with the effort, replace it in its socket; for now the pole was topped with a fan-shaped collection of wires upheld by an insulator.

The legation would be calling the camp at Arraca presently, and it was not hard to guess the news they would send. To prevent this was the task set for Segovia, and he realized that only by unexampled good fortune could he accomplish it. Here were two sturdy men, armed no doubt. Either one was his match in strength. Either one, he was persuaded, would go to any length to defeat his purpose. If he should leap the wall they would be upon him before he could advance a yard. And then! It would be a silent, straining struggle in which he would be worsted—unless he plied the murderous weapon at his side.

It was a sickening thought, and Segovia shrank from it. And yet delay spelled failure. He imagined—so wrought up was his fancy—that he could hear through the open hatch the spark-balls crackling in the cellar far below. He was about to risk all and vault the wall, trusting to his felt-shod feet to land him silently, when he saw one of the Germans go to the scuttle and prepare to descend through it. He waited tensely.

With but a single man to deal with his chances of success would be enhanced a hundred-fold. The man descended. The other idled about, humming a snatch from an opera. Segovia recognized it—from Tannhäuser, the "Pilgrims' Chorus." How perfectly secure the fellow felt!

The man was approaching the party-wall. Segovia instantly conceived a plan of action. He marked in his mind the spot at which the man was likely to pull up, squatted low and backed away, paused a vital moment to gather his energies, then hurled himself at the barrier and over it. His hope was to catapult into the other and bowl him off his feet, or, if not that, so to disconcert him that he could not take an immediate offensive.

It was a miss on both counts. Segovia botched the jump. His toe caught on the top course of bricks, and he tumbled in a heap on the opposing roof. Before he could recover himself a pistol-butt hammered on his head. A quiver ran through his limbs, and he was whisked away out of his senses.

He came to himself in a lighted back-room of the legation building. Some one was trickling raw brandy down his throat from a flask. He choked and coughed and opened his eyes. He was stretched out on the floor with a chair cushion under his head. The man bending over him raised up. An ironical smile curved his lips. He spoke in Spanish, but with a pronounced accent.

"Ah, you recognize me, I see, señor."

"Gottfried Neiderlein," Segovia mumbled.

"Your devoted servant, Lieutenant Don Enrique Segovia. Let me congratulate you on your recovery. Gustave was a little afraid that the medicine he administered was too potent." He paused, but his unpleasant smile persisted. "Well," he continued, "we still go on, Señor Lieutenant."

He strode to the door, and opened it. The hum of a dynamo charging the condensers of the wireless in the cellar stole into the room. Segovia clenched his teeth to stifle a groan. He had failed miserably and completely. The man returned to him.

"There is water in the corner," he said. "You may wish to use it. Shall I help you up, Señor Lieutenant?"

"No," answered Segovia shortly. "And for your information I will say that I no longer have a claim to the title you give me. I have resigned my commission in the army."

"Oho! This act of yours, then, is that of a simple citizen. No one to blame but you. *Un buen chiste!*"

* * *

SEGOVIA vouchsafed no reply. He drew upon will-power and compelled himself to a sitting posture. From this he clambered painfully to his feet. His head was like a whirligig on his shoulders, and he staggered to a chair and dropped into it. The German placed the flask on a table near him.

"I will leave this with you," he said. "I would advise a stiff drink now. You will be the better for it. These windows, you will observe, are barred. The door I will lock. His excellency will decide what further is to be done with you."

Segovia consulted his watch. It was one o'clock. He prayed that Jimmy had not failed as he had done.

"Herr Kaufman is not in the legation?" he asked.

The other gave him a quick glance.

"He is here," he replied.

Segovia's heart sank, but he spoke with forced indifference.

"Then say to him that unless he comes very shortly to his decision he will find it taken from him."

"Ha! You threaten?"

"I counsel. My friends, good Herr Neiderlein, are not all dead."

"Bah! You have invaded the legation. His excellency will know how to require satisfaction. Meanwhile your friends can whistle on the doorstep."

Neiderlein marched out, and the key rasped in the lock after him. Acting on the man's advise Segovia reached for the brandy flask and drank from it direct, slowly and sparingly. It put life into him, and he got up and took stock of himself. He had been relieved, of course, of his hatchet and pistol. But otherwise he was not disabled—his bones were sound. He went over to the wash-stand in the corner, and surveyed himself in the mirror suspended above it.

He turned from the picture in disgust. His face was grimed with the dirt of the roof, and streaked with blood from a gash over one eye; and his head behind the right ear was wofully bruised. It was the mark of Gustave Landeker's vehement attention to him.

Segovia washed the grime from his face, and used some of the brandy as a lotion for his wounds. After this he resumed his chair and lighted a cigaret. Half an hour went by. Neiderlein unlocked the door, and looked in. Segovia fancied there was an air of uneasiness about him. Neither spoke, and the German, after an irresolute pause, went away.

Segovia knitted his brows. Had Neiderlein lied about Kaufman? Had Jimmy succeeded in as great a degree as he himself had failed? Ah, then the legation would have something to wire Arraca that was news indeed! He was jubilant with the thought. He forgot his own failure, his own unease of body, and reveled in the growing assurance of his friend's triumph. Singularly enough not once did the image of Mary Taylor present itself, except in the merest shadowy outline—an inconclusive background figure in a stirring canvas.

It was striking two when Neiderlein again appeared in the door. Segovia was convinced that he was correct in his deduction concerning Kaufman. The man was plainly worried. He entered, and stood regarding his captive with a lowering face.

"You have come with a message for me from his imperial excellency?" questioned Segovia mockingly.

Neiderlein strode over to him.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

Segovia raised his eyes in surprise.

"Where is who?"

"Herr Kaufman."

"Why, has he gone? I understood you to say that he was here in the legation."

Neiderlein scowled at him menacingly.

"It doesn't matter what you understood.

Ortega will be glad to see that car again. Mr. Brewer, this is Mr.——"

"Leave it off!" cut in the boy wrinkling his nose. "Just plain Billy Smith, sir—Billy to my friends. Miss Brewer hasn't called me so yet, but I'm hopeful."

Jimmy glanced at Winifred. Her eyes were dancing. It was a new phase of her to him, and he could have hugged Billy for bringing it forth. And he heard from Brewer a foreign sound. The man was laughing! Not loud, but in a stifled sort of way as though he was fearful of letting the unaccustomed emotion have free play.

"I will do it for her, Billy—for us both," Brewer said. "And we shall hope to see you back soon."

"It's that what bothers me," replied the boy. "How am I going to get back? If I hire a machine it will be like trailing an anise bag 'cross country for the hounds to follow; and to walk is a pretty stiff stroll for a chap out of training."

"You are not coming back, not right away," Jimmy told him. "You are to stay in town and pick up news. There'll be doings today if I'm not mistaken."

"We could send Sam in for him after dark," suggested Brewer. "Billy could walk out on the Santa Marta Road and meet him. I'd go myself, but I don't drive."

Winifred had turned thoughtful. She was debating a point that had suddenly presented itself.

"I think," she said slowly, "it would be a wise thing to do if you both went back. I think that Mr. Perry ought to be seen around town tomorrow. It would throw them off the track, perhaps, though I'm not sure. I am afraid they will have a clue to Herr Kaufman's whereabouts."

Jimmy directed a startled look at her.

"A clue!" he exclaimed. "The thing was done absolutely without a hitch. What clue could he have left?"

"It isn't that," Winifred said. "Nothing positive. It's a clue by inference. It did not occur to me until Mr. Smith—until Billy—explained why he came tonight instead of Mr. Segovia. Tell me, is this Miss Taylor tall, with close-cut yellow hair, and eyes like—like tourmalines—sometimes—and again like——"

"Like Prussian blue," interpolated Billy.

"Yes, yes!" Jimmy made an eager step forward. "You have seen her? Where?"

"Here. It was yesterday, after you had gone. She drove in with another woman. She expressed surprise at finding the place occupied. She said she'd been told it was a quaint old house, and she desired to see it."

Jimmy dashed his fist into his palm. Here indeed was a discovery.

"I met her as I was going out," he cried. "She simply wanted to learn what brought me here."

"Well, she didn't learn," gave out Brewer. "We didn't ask her in. I let her see that she wasn't welcome."

It was the last thing he should have done, decided Jimmy; but he did not voice it. Winifred was speaking to him.

"I did not think anything of it at the time. I put her visit down to idle curiosity. And even now I don't just understand what brought her. You are a stranger in Cortina——"

"Spying is the woman's business," interrupted Jimmy. "And I'm a friend of Enrique. It was enough for her. She wasn't overlooking any bets. And I was cracking her up to you only that morning. Heavenly powers!"

He laughed ruefully.

The least little glimmer of complacency brightened the girl's eyes; but it was instantly quenched.

"OF COURSE you couldn't know," she said. "I was rather pleased with her. She has an engaging manner."

"Part of her equipment," snorted Jimmy.

Billy spoke.

"Miss Brewer is dead right, Jimmy. You must go with me. Sister Mary will begin to gossip as soon as she learns Kaufman has turned up missing. Say, it would be a joke to go into Morales' bank and get a bill changed. Gosh! That would set 'em back a peg or two!"

Jimmy looked dubiously at Winifred.

"I reckon it's the thing to do, but it leaves you short-handed here. You must be dead for sleep. And you, Mr. Brewer. I don't fancy the thought——"

"We slept in the afternoon," put in Brewer briskly. "And anyway, Sam and I can relieve each other at Kaufman's door. Winny may go to bed when she likes."

Jimmy hesitated still. He was frowning at his swift-succeeding thoughts.

"Tonight won't matter, I suppose," he

"On what?"

"On developments."

Kaufman glowered at him from under his bushy brows. He knew what was implied.

"You have done this thing at the instance of the Zanhorian Government. You are in its pay."

"Wrong," Jimmy answered. "I did it on my individual responsibility. I am not in the pay of any Government. I am a private American citizen. It came to my knowledge that you were making mischief for America. I decided to put a spoke in your wheel. I've done it. Whatever the consequence I am willing to assume it. And I will repeat, Mr. Minister, what my young friend said to you in the car: you will remain here until the plot you have hatched against my country is uncovered. After that——"

"You will pay a price for this," thrust in Kaufman wrathfully. "You will all pay! And it will not be reckoned in gold. *Verdammt Amerikander schwein!*"

He clutched a chair with a hairy hand, gave it a twirl, and sat down with his back deliberately turned to them. Jimmy grinned at Brewer.

"The gentleman's pleasant way of bidding us goodnight," he remarked. "Let us go."

They left the German sitting as he was, and closed the door on him. Brewer shot to a bolt on it.

"I put it there," he said. "And this, too, is my work. We shall want to know what goes on in there." He indicated a slit sawed in the door. A slide was arranged to cover it at will.

"A good idea—bang up," declared Jimmy, and he could see the man warm to the praise. "Sam, here is a little something I promised you." A yellow coin was pressed into the negro's great paw. "Suppose Sam takes the first watch until we can decide on a schedule," he suggested to Brewer. "It's hardly necessary, perhaps, but it is just as well to let Kaufman know that we intend to keep an eye on him from the start."

"Exactly," agreed Brewer. "Sam, fetch a chair. And mind you don't go to sleep. If that person gets away it's a hanging matter for all of us. Do you understand?"

"I does, Boss," Sam replied with an earnestness that denoted a literal interpretation of the portentous words.

Jimmy chuckled to himself as they went up the hall to the living-room, into which Billy and Winifred disappeared. Brewer was certainly blossoming out into another man. Jimmy was glad for Brewer's sake, for Winifred's sake, and—yes—for his own sake. It was hard lines to be condemned to contempt for the father of the girl he felt so strongly drawn to. He was genuinely rejoiced to see this change in Brewer. And the leaven that had worked it was the most inspiriting aspect of the case. It had lifted worse men to redeeming heights of honor and repute.

BILLY was inspecting the guns Ortega had sent out. He had introduced himself to Winifred in his own proper name, and explained why it was he had taken Segovia's place in the car. His light-hearted way of projecting events on the screen of his personal preoption of results was irresistible, and Winifred smiled despite the anxiety that rested on her in the knowledge of the grave step to which they all were committed.

Billy seemed to regard it simply as a harum-scarum adventure that would make good reading in a magazine. Or it might have been that he was making little of the danger in an effort to comfort her. Women, in Billy's well-matured opinion, were creatures of small courage; otherwise why should they take fright at a mouse, or a hundred harmless creeping things he could name?

"Of course," he was saying, "they will set up an awful holler at the legation when they find old Doctor Kaufman is missing from their midst; but what can they do? Who is going to tell them where he is? Echo answers—'Who-o-o'?"

Winifred laughed.

"Suppose she answers 'Here'?"

Billy patted the Mauser he was holding.

"Why, then, we may have a use for this. But don't you worry, Miss Brewer. Echo isn't Irish. She'll answer according to rule. *Hist—*" as Jimmy and Brewer entered—"Here comes the leader of the Black Hand. Neat little blow-pipes these, Jimmy," he rattled on. "I've a bet with Miss Brewer that, give me an arm rest and the wind right, I can hit a church at fifty feet three times out of ten. Want to come in on the money?"

"You'd better be hitting the road home, young fellow," Jimmy retorted. "Señor

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conceded. "It's the day that worries me. If the Taylor woman does suspect us we will have those Germans out here for a rescue."

"We've got to risk it," declared Billy. "The longer we can keep 'em guessing the better."

"Yes," approved Winifred. "And as father has said, Sam will meet you; only I think it will be better if it is at noon. He can go to the post-office, and from there to the Santa Marta Road and pick you up."

Jimmy shook his head.

"Sam must stay. He is worth two ordinary men. And Kaufman is afraid of him. This man Diego who works about the place, can he drive your car?"

"Tio Diego!" Winifred smiled. "You couldn't coax him into the machine. He believes it is a contrivance of the evil one. But the matter is easily arranged. I will come for you."

"You!" This did not appeal to Jimmy. He eyed Brewer. "If there should be trouble in town——"

Brewer interposed.

"Winifred is not afraid. She's not that kind. And you'd better be going. It will be getting light in another two hours."

Brewer's manner was authoritative. Jimmy bowed to it. Winifred's eyes rested on her father with a little flash of pride in which doubt yet had part; for the miracle of his transformation was a thing so new to her that she feared to accept it wholly lest it pass and leave her in greater depths than before.

Billy was already at the door impatient to be away.

"Come on, Midas, Jr.," he called. "It's nearly two. We're wasting time."

Brewer saw them off.

"Don't be uneasy about us," he said to Jimmy. "We will keep our end up."

"By Jove, sir, I'm sure of it," Jimmy rejoined, and impulsively held out his hand to him.

When they had crossed the ravine, and were burning up the road to town Billy sundered the silence that reigned between them. He giggled as he spoke.

"And I was trying to stiffen her spine—that girl! Thought she was the scary kind. Oh, gee!"

"You've a lot to learn, Smith," said Jimmy shortly.

"With a teacher like that? You bet!"

The laugh was still on the boy's lips when the car rose up under them, and went wild for a perilous moment. Billy cut off the gas, and brought it to a grinding halt. Jimmy was pitched forward against the windshield. And the singular thing was that the car itself pitched and rocked in a curious gentle rhythm. The pit of Jimmy's stomach fell in, and a sickening nausea followed. Then as suddenly the movement ceased.

"Good Lord, what was it?" he gasped.

Automatically he pulled out his watch. The hands pointed to three minutes after two.

"A quake," Billy answered. He was feeling sick himself. "We'll wait a minute. There may be another. They come usually in pairs."

There was another, though it was not so severe as the first. But Billy waited for a time after it had passed. He wished to make sure that the disturbance was entirely over.

"It's the third I've known since I've been out here, and I don't like them," he volunteered in a strained voice. "They say it's old Borazo yawning—that big mountain back there. Nothing serious, they claim; but I don't know. One of these days he may yawn too long, and then—I guess we can go on now."

"Hold up!" Jimmy spoke sharply. "Perhaps we'd better go back to the house. The quake may have damaged it."

"That old stone barracks! It's been standing half a century. Old Borazo would have to do more than yawn to bowl it down. In the city they haven't even turned over in bed for this baby shock. They are used to 'em."

Billy pressed the starter, and they took up the road again. Jimmy had nothing to say until they had left the country behind, and crossed the bridge at the Arroyo Rebelde. A tropic earth tremor is not a tongue-loosener for the outlander till he is thoroughly over his fright.

## CHAPTER XX

### IN THE NIGHT HOURS

THEIR headlights picked up a man at the farther side of the bridge. He raised his hand in a signal to them.

"It's the chap Ortega said he'd have

waiting for us, I reckon," Jimmy remarked.

Billy slowed to a stop. The man came to them. His eyes lifted as he saw that there were two persons in the car, but he offered no comment.

"From the señor superintendent," he said in Spanish. "With your permission, gentlemen, I will drive."

"Ask him if they felt the earthquake here," Jimmy requested of Billy. "I can't find the words for it."

The man shrugged in reply to the question.

"As one stretches himself in his sleep, señor, no more."

"You see! Borazo's yawn," Billy reminded Jimmy. "The natives think nothing of it."

They came to Morales' house, gliding softly by with lights out. But lights showed in the house. They were astir there at this unseemly hour of the night. Billy whispered a conjecture.

"Perhaps the legation has been telephoning. Kaufman would have gone there from Morales' for news from Arraca. They want to know what keeps him."

"It may be that Mrs. Morales is worse," suggested Jimmy ironically. "Too bad we can't leave our cards."

They swung into the Calle Central, proceeded north two blocks, and drew up at Ortega's private office door.

"Rap four times," instructed their conductor when they had descended.

With this he drove away.

Ortega opened to them. If he was surprised at Jimmy's return to town his face did not show it. When they were inside and seated he looked at Jimmy.

"Well?" was all he said.

"Quite well," Jimmy grinned at him. "He's under lock and key."

"Quiet as a lamb, if not so eatable," put in Billy.

Jimmy gave his reason for returning. Ortega approved it.

"Miss Brewer was right. It was well thought of," he said. "Brewer himself—will he hold out? I know, as you are aware, his history."

Billy was all ears at this. Jimmy noted it.

"Yes," he answered briefly. "Have you heard from Enrique?"

"No. I am a little uneasy about him." Ortega glanced at a clock on his desk. "They raised the wireless two hours ago."

"Um. You know that, sir?"

"Yes. I watched with a night glass from the roof."

"Mrs. Isaacs!" snapped Jimmy. "It's what she did—used a glass. But pshaw! I'm off on that again. Mr. Lane says she's a harmless little creature. She called on him——"

He left off. Some one was knocking at the door, insistently, and without pause.

"Segovia!" cried Billy.

Don Emilio's hand was on the knob, opening the door. It was Segovia. He stood alert and listening on the step for a moment. Then he entered and threw himself into the first chair. His clothing was torn. The gash over his eye had recently bled afresh, and his face was stained from it. He breathed in gulping gasps.

"By Jove, from your looks you've had an experience, old man!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Here, swallow this."

Ortega had produced a bottle and decanted a glass of wine. Segovia drained it greedily.

"Get your wind before you try to talk," Ortega bade him, and went into an adjoining room.

But Segovia did not obey him.

"Kaufman?" he panted at Jimmy. "You—got—him?"

"Easy as falling down stairs. Billy Smith here drove."

Segovia nodded at Billy.

"Good!" he wheezed.

Ortega came in with a washbasin and towel. He set the basin on the desk.

"Wash up and you'll feel better, Don Enrique," he advised.

Enrique got up. He bathed his face and hands, brushed off his clothes, and returned to his seat.

"I'm right again," he avowed. "Got my wind. It was a run, that. Landeker chased me. I expected a shot in the back any minute; but I guess he was afraid of the row it would make. He gave up, and I came on."

"Suppose you begin with the roof," submitted Ortega quietly. "What took place up there?"

Srgovia made an apologetic gesture.

"Oh, yes, of course. I'm ahead of my story."

He related the occurrences at the legation.

His audience gave him a hushed attention, but when he arrived at the point where Neiderlein drew his pistol on him Billy broke in excitedly.

"Gee!" he ejaculated. "Did he shoot?"

Even Ortega laughed, and Billy grinned as he realized the "bull" he had perpetrated.

"It was at that instant the quake came," said Segovia. "You can imagine what happened, Don Emilio; Neiderlein is new to the country. I struck at his arm. It sent the weapon flying, and we were at each other's throat. But his fright gave me the advantage. I got him down to his knees—and to his back—and I battered his head on the floor. I took the pistol, went out, and locked him in."

"Well done," said Ortega. "And then?"

Segovia continued—

"I found my hatchet on a stand outside the door, together with my pistol. I knew what to do then. The cellar stairs were close by. I ran to them. The wireless operator was coming up. He, too, was frightened, but not so that he had lost his wits. When he saw me he seemed at once to understand what had passed. He charged at me.

"I hurled Neiderlein's gun at him. It took him full in the chest. He lost his balance—there was no rail to hang to—and he went over backward down the stairs. It was a nasty fall, and he didn't move afterward. I thought he was dead, but I couldn't stop to find out. I remembered Landeker up on the roof. He'd be coming down perhaps.

"WELL, I found on the operator's table duplicates of the messages he'd been sending and receiving; Neiderlein had the originals, I suppose. I gathered them up and stuffed them in my pocket. Then I went at his condensers with my hatchet—at his key and spark-balls. I smashed everything in sight. And, in some way I can't explain, I cut the electric light circuit. Anyway, everything went dark."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Billy breathlessly.

He was sitting on the extreme edge of his chair, carried out of himself by the recital. Segovia went on.

"I had matches, and I struck one. It showed me the stairs, and I made for them. I wanted to get out of that place. I had one foot on the steps when I felt the other gripped by the man on the ground. He had come to. We had it out, fast and furious. He was hurt; I could tell by his groans. I managed to break loose from him at last, and climbed the stairs. It was ticklish business in the dark. When I got up I didn't know where I was, and I wanted to find the street door. I struck another match; the door was straight ahead. And so was Landeker. He was groping his way to the cellar. I blew out the match, but he had seen me, of course."

"The deuce," fumed Jimmy, as Segovia paused to light a cigaret. "You can do that later. Get on."

Ortega said nothing. He waited patiently. Segovia inhaled zestfully.

"The first I've had in an hour," he mentioned, and proceeded with his story. "There is not much more to tell. Landeker would have taken a shot at me, I'm sure, but he was afraid that some one was behind me and he would hit him. He called out in German, and Neiderlein set up a cry from the room. I could hear Landeker coming, and dropped to my knees. I was lucky. I caught his legs and jerked them from under him, and I got a stiff kick in the stomach as he went over. It pretty nearly did for me, but I was up before he was, and found the door. Fortunately it wasn't locked, and I was in the street with a fair start of Landeker."

"And you came here direct?" inquired Ortega gently.

"Not so. I knew enough for that. I ran north to the Calle Cristina, east a block, south three, and west here. I lost Landeker after the second turn."

"That was well," praised the superintendent.

"By George, Enrique," exploded Jimmy, "ours was tame as a Sunday-school picnic beside your performance. You're an honor to the old Tech."

Segovia looked pleased, but he said:

"I'm not so sure of that. You see, they had their say back and forth with Arraca before I got my work in. That's the mischief of it. They sent off that Washington dispatch, of course, and I have a notion Neiderlein let them know he feared for Kaufman's safety. But here is the stuff."

He drew from his pocket a sheaf of papers, smoothed out the rumpled sheets on his knee, and passed them to Ortega at the desk, saying—

"German, but we can find somebody——"

"Right here!" cried Jimmy elatedly. "Billy, do your stunt."

Billy studied the sheets a moment, and looked up with a bored air.

"In code. It might as well be Choctaw for all I can make of it."

Segovia stared blankly at Jimmy.

"An honor to old Poly—oh, yes, I am!" he jeered bitterly. "I've raised the devil, and that's all."

"You wrecked the plant. They won't be talking back and forth in a hurry," consoled Jimmy. "That's a lot at this stage of the game."

Ortega smiled in his quiet way.

"You have done a good night's work, all of you, my friends. We can guess what these messages say in a general way. Or if we can't, it is not a vital matter. The thing is, we've got the key to the situation in Herr Kaufman, and we've stopped the conversations with the lumber camp. Now we will get some sleep against what may happen when day comes. I've a car waiting for you in the yard, Don Enrique. You can drop Jimmy at his hotel, and Mr. Smith——"

"Billy, sir," put in the boy.

"And Billy——"

"Billy stays with me tonight," spoke up Jimmy. "And it's only a step or two to the hotel. We'll walk it. Enrique is all in. Pack him home. Good night, old chap. See you later—somewhere."

He gripped Enrique's hand, and hustled him to the door despite his protests. Ortega had touched a button, and a man stood ready to pilot the worn-out young Zanhorian to the car.

"Well, aren't you going?" asked Ortega quizzically of the two who remained. "It is three o'clock."

"I just wanted to say, sir, that Morales' house was lighted up when we passed," replied Jimmy. "I was about to mention it when Enrique came in. Do you think the legation has been talking to Morales?"

"Very likely. But there is another thing that is worrying him. Miss Taylor has not returned, or she had not at the last report, an hour ago."

The boys stared at him.

"That's funny," observed Jimmy who, of course, meant exactly the opposite.

Don Emilio shrugged.

"Excessively so," he commented dryly.

They were leaving when Jimmy bethought himself of another question.

"If I am overcurious stop me. But I would like to know, sir, if the detectaphone was of any help. Did they use the dining-room?"

"Yes. But their talk was low. My man could catch only snatches of it. They intend to rescind American concessions in the republic for one thing, and to make the abrogation general if they succeed in their dream of creating a United States of Central America. That's of interest to you. Other points deal with the methods of the revolution which, by the way, waits only on a word from Peralta. And we were right about the card you saw in the bank. It was Kaufman's call for a meeting on Sunday night—'the committee' he termed it."

"But the names of the committee. Weren't they mentioned?"

Ortega shook his head.

"They go by numbers, it appears. Only one name was spoken. A woman's—a 'Miss Prietz.' Herr Kaufman was exercised about her. She had failed him in some way—what way the detectaphone missed—and much, it seems, depended on her."

"Another woman!" exclaimed Jimmy.

The superintendent met this with his cryptic smile.

"A woman may have more names than one."

"Miss Taylor?"

"*Quien sabe?* Good night. I shall sleep here."

MR. RICARDO GOMEZ himself took Jimmy up in the lift to his room. He had inquired solicitously about Segovia, and now he said:

"It is a night of retardation of the sleep, *caballeros*. You are not single in your deferment. The madame of your country—New York—her also is arrived *muy tarde.* Oho!"

"You mean Mrs. Isaacs?" Jimmy regarded him curiously.

"*Si. Es la una*—one o'clock—her is came."

Billy exchanged a glance with Jimmy, but to Mr. Gomez' disappointment neither remarked on the information. It was not until they were in the room that they spoke.

"What do you think of that?" asked Billy.

"To the deuce with Mrs. Isaacs!" snapped Jimmy crossly. "I've quit guessing about her. Shut up, and get to bed. I'm dead tired."

ENRIQUE SEGOVIA meanwhile was adding to his adventures of the night. His way home led through the Calle Dolores. As the car came abreast of the park the driver uttered a queer exclamation, and threw out his clutch.

"What is it?" demanded Segovia sleepily.

"Mateo, of the force, and a woman. There is trouble."

Mateo's watch had been rewarded. He had "saved his skin," or at least he was so persuaded. The woman had come forth from the house. The heave of the earth-shock had penetrated to her deadened consciousness, and brought to her the first stirrings of awakened life. Slowly, through the mental fog in which she was lost, she had made her way to thought, then to leaden action in which minutes crawled onward to an hour. And when at last she was out of the place of her imprisonment she had stood looking about her bewilderedly, endeavoring to get her bearings.

Her will to do returned, and she started down the street in the direction of the Calle Central. She reeled weakly—drunkenly, Mateo thought—and he had hastened over to her from the park. He had offered, cunningly, to aid her, to see her to whatever place she was in mind to go. The woman had waved him off; had, in fact, flourished a revolver at him.

It was this sight, as he peered from the machine, that caught Segovia's eye. He got out, and ran forward to the pair. A cry broke from him.

"Miss Taylor—Mary! My God!"

"Enrique!"

Miss Taylor thrust the pistol in her waist, and let herself droop toward him. She was, indeed, sick and shaken; and yet her clouded faculties responded to the imperious demand she made upon them. She moaned piteously.

"Take me home. Oh, take me home!"

"Yes, yes, at once," Segovia assured her. "But what has happened to you? Why are you wandering on the streets—at this hour—in this part of the city? And the man—he would not have harmed you. He is a police officer."

Miss Taylor drooped pronouncedly on his arm.

"Take me home, Enrique," she pleaded. "I am dreadfully ill. I will tell you as we go. Take me home!"

Mateo had fallen back to the car. He was in low, rapid colloquy with the driver. As Segovia came up Mateo touched his hat to him.

"She came out of 140, señor," he said, and walked away.

Segovia helped his charge into the car. She sank upon the cushions with a long sobbing sigh.

"To the Señor Morales' house in the Avenida Alejandrino," Segovia directed. He turned to his companion. Her head had fallen to one side. "She's fainted!" he cried out. "Drive like the devil, man!"

He chafed the girl's hot, dry hands, but with no response from her. His senses were in a whirl. This staggering event bursting from out the curtain of the night on him had scattered his wits. He could not think collectively. He could only wonder in a dazed way what it all meant.

They were nearing Morales' house. He called Mary's name, softly urgent. Her eyes opened. She pressed the hand holding hers. He bent down to her.

"I am better," she murmured.

"Thank God! You have given me a horrible fright."

They were at the house, stopping. She sat up with unexpected energy.

"Stay at home until I send for you tomorrow," she breathed in his ear. "I will tell you then. I am not able—tonight—to go through with it."

"Of course not," he soothed. "Tomorrow—or never. It rests with you. I do not ask a word."

She gave him a strange look, and of a sudden a fugitive kiss brushed his cheek.

"You are a dear boy—a dear boy," she said with a catch in her voice. "No! I can get out alone. I am much better. Don't wait. Go! I wish it."

She stepped down unaided from the car. Some one was opening the door of the house.

"*Vaya!*" she bade the driver, and went slowly up the walk to the beckoning door.

Enrique, athrill with the kiss she had bestowed on him, yet found his lips mechanically repeating the words of Mateo as he drove away from Dolores Street—

"She came out of 140, señor." They had glanced off his mind at the time, but they came back now knocking for admittance. "She came out of 140."

Why, that was Brewer's late residence. Had a new tenant been found for it in this short space? If so, who? Who, in three days, could have established such a claim on Mary that she should spend long hours in the house—for of course she had gone there early—and then be brutally turned forth in the dead of night to find her way home alone and ill? Who?

A thought presented itself to Enrique that made the blood surge like liquid fire in his veins; that caused his nails to bite into his palms until the very pain of it cleared his vision. No, not that! Mary was above suspicion. It would all be made plain to him in the morning. Something so far out of the ordinary that it could not be guessed had influenced her. Something. . . .

"Oh, my God!" he cried in his heart. "And I must wait!"

Not until he was at home and in bed did it occur to Enrique, amid the dark jumble of his reflections, that here was no secret he could hold as his own. Two other men shared it with him, and tomorrow Don Emilio would make a third. What could he say, if questioned by him? Request him to wait until he had heard from Mary?

Enrique did not sleep as he had thought to do when he bade good night to them all at police headquarters less than an hour gone.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HUE AND CRY

OVER the seas and under the seas on the morning of Friday the sixth day of April flashed the news that the Congress of the United States of America had formally declared the existence of a state of war with the Imperial German Government. On land, to the farthermost settled regions, the word was sent. Telegraph offices hummed with it. On the broad waters ship after ship caught the winged tidings and relayed it on.

The white yacht *Sea Bird* caught it from a Belize boat talking to a sister ship plowing eastward by the Rosalind Bank. The secret German submersible, lurking like a poisonous creature of the deep off Matina Cay, caught it from an Elders & Pinsch freighter out of Puerto Mono querying a New Orleans mail steamer headed for Colon; and from this last the U. S. gunboat *Lincoln*, crawling up the coast under orders, avidly drank in the news.

She was too far east of Matina Cay for the U's limited radio to listen in, but the powerful plant at the Arraca lumber camp overheard, and passed it and the gunboat's position to the submarine. There was a licking of chops aboard, and a disciplined bustle of preparation. This was Lieutenant Kumpel's mission—to hinder in Peralta's behalf any interference from seaward. Now, with this long-expected news, the way was made plain for him.

In the camp there was also the bustle of preparation for immediate action. Stirring advices had been received during the night. First had come from Cortina the transcript of the Washington dispatch. This was relayed to the U and to the *Sea Bird*. Word was returned that General Peralta would sail instantly for Puerto Mono. It was a five-hundred-mile run, but the yacht was fast; it would make port in the early morning of Saturday. The message was transmitted to the legation. In the meantime intelligence had come from Neiderlein of Segovia's attempt on the wireless and, later, Neiderlein's anxiety for Kaufman.

Colonel Heinrich Ludolf, in command at the camp, did not mention Neiderlein's fears to the *Sea Bird*. He deemed it premature; for at first he did not attach any great importance to it—Herr Kaufman had his reasons for absenting himself. Nevertheless he flashed back an imperative injunction to the secretary—

Find him, and report.

It was this message that had sent Neiderlein in on his last visit to Segovia with drawn pistol. And this message was the last, as events proved, that the camp got through to the legation. There was no response to repeated calls after this. Colonel Ludolf understood that something calamitous had befallen at the other end, and now alarm for Herr Kaufman's safety fell upon him. Yet he refrained from communicating with the yacht.

The thought in his mind was too incredible to be seriously entertained. And even could this incredible thing have happened the imperial envoy would wish, he knew, the *coup* to be carried out. To stop it now would create doubt and suspicion in Peralta's followers. It might, in truth, result in an irretrievable fiasco. So he let the yacht come on.

But as the hours passed without further word from the legation what at first had seemed unthinkable took on the guise of probability, and finally conviction. Ludolf summoned to him Sub-Lieutenant Karl Hecht, told him of the purloined dispatch, of the change in Peralta's plans, and of Neiderlein's misgivings concerning Kaufman. He added:

"It is possible that his excellency has been abducted. I base it on obvious reasons—it would confound the supporters of the revolution. Very well, we will nullify it. You are to go to Cortina on the morning train. Pick four men to accompany you. Learn from Herr Neiderlein what has been done. He will have made demands on the Zanhorian Government; but the Government will know nothing—of course. So, if the whereabouts of his excellency has not been discovered, discover it. Find him. Stop at nothing. Herr Kaufman must be back when I enter the city tomorrow. He is the Kaiser's deputy."

IN CORTINA a late edition of *La Cronica* came out with the news from Washington in twelve-point type to make the most of brevity. As the action of Congress had been discounted in advance by the President's message it caused but small excitement. It was discussed mildly at breakfast-tables and in business offices, and then dismissed. People went about their affairs in the usual leisurely way. On the surface life in Cortina was rippled only by the stones of individual desires cast into the tranquil waters; the events of the night were as a sealed book to the commonalty.

But in officialdom it was different. Matters of import occupied it—quietly, cooly, yet none the less intensely. President Hurango sat in secret council in the rose room of the executive mansion with his secretary of state, his secretary of war, and the State superintendent of police. Present by request was the American minister. In the president's hands was definite information of the revolutionary movement—the arranged day for Peralta's landing, the strength of his immediate personnel, and the aid he counted on in the Province of Puerto Mono, and in the Provinces of Boaca, Espero and Cortina.

Furthermore, President Hurango even had in his possession on this day, written down in General Peralta's own scrawling script, the names of the chief revolutionists in the state, with the posts promised them under the new Government. It was an invaluable paper most unexpectedly delivered to him. Indeed, it was the prime reason for the meeting. Secret service agents were on their way to the provinces to make arrests.

In the capital arrests would not be made until late in the day. This delay was for the purpose of allowing the report of Herr Kaufman's disappearance to seep privily into the ears of the conspirators. To first dismay them, disorganize and sow distrust among them, would the more readily bring confession when they were taken into custody. Then would be the time to return Herr Kaufman. Meanwhile all avenues of exit from the city were guarded.

That the desired intelligence was already in process of dissemination was indicated by a report to the council from the assistant secretary of state over the president's private telephone, to wit: Herr Neiderlein had called at the department with the opening of the doors to demand the whereabouts of the German minister; also to demand an explanation of the forcible detention overnight of one Otto Stoll, driver of the minister's car, and only just released by the police. Herr Neiderlein's initial demand, the assistant secretary had reported, was received with amazed concern, but with a protest against the aspersion cast upon the Government; and to his following demand assurances of an immediate investigation had been given, and redress if warranted.

In brief, Spanish diplomacy had returned Herr Neiderlein to his legation as empty-handed as he had left it, but with unabated suspicion in his heart. And it rankled the more because he knew the secretary was laughing in his sleeve at him for not daring to voice a third demand—punishment of the man who had invaded the legation the night before.

While these events were in progress Jimmy Perry opened heavy eyes upon the day. He yawned and blinked and then in answer to the insistent call of his subliminal self, sat up suddenly wide awake. He fished his watch from under his pillow and looked at the time. The result was a vigorous pummeling of Billy Smith into reluctant consciousness.

"Hey, you grandson of the seven sleepers, it's after nine," he cried. "Shake a leg there! We've got to get out on the street and learn the news. And Miss Brewer will be here at twelve."

Billy responded querulously.

"I was just dreaming we'd dyed old popper Kaufman's whiskers green, and set a goat loose on 'em. You've spoiled the fun."

They dressed, and started down for breakfast. In the corridor they paused and stared. Mrs. Isaacs' door stood open, and there was not a vestige in the room of occupancy. They crossed over and looked in; there were no personal belongings anywhere. Everything was in order for the next comer.

"Not even a hairpin left," said Billy. "She's found her uncle and gone."

They questioned a *criada* who was making up an adjoining room. She only knew that the office had sent up word that No. 249 was vacated.

"I'm going to find out where she has gone," declared Jimmy. "She's given me the creeps the last two days, that woman. I want to know for sure that I'll see no more of her."

The clerk on duty was not the polyglot Mr. Gomez. He spoke but the language of his fathers. Billy interviewed him, and learned that Mrs. Isaacs had left on the 7:30 Puerto Mono train.

"I hope she doesn't miss the boat," exclaimed Jimmy.

"Huh. There are a dozen stops between here and there," Billy reminded him. "Cheer up. Maybe she'll be coming back."

It was half-after ten when they came out from breakfast. They decided on a program. Jimmy thought it advisable that he keep away from the American Legation at this juncture, but Billy could go without exciting comment. He was to ascertain from Mr. Lane what developments, if any, had occurred in that quarter, and then proceed via the Calle Cristina to the Santa Marta Road. Meantime Jimmy, acting on Billy's suggestion at the farm, was to visit the Banco Nacional and show himself to Morales.

Billy went on his mission. Jimmy waited a while, then sauntered over to the post-office, bought some cards for which he had no use, and lounged along the Calle Grande to the bank. If secret eyes were on him, he presented the appearance of one without a care in the world.

He strolled into the bank, and spoke to the teller he had met through Segovia on his first visit to the place. The man changed the bill Jimmy tendered, and expressed a burning desire to be of further service. Jimmy inquired casually after Señor Morales. Perhaps, if he was not engaged. He came to an abrupt pause. Morales' car was at the door, and Morales was entering the bank. He was late this day. Jimmy's glance took swift appraisal of him. He discovered, he thought, signs of disquiet in his manner. His thick lips were compressed, his beady eyes roved from point to point. They fell on Jimmy as he stepped forward to greet him, and the man stopped dead, a baffled expression on his face—the expression of one who has accepted a proposition as logically sound only to find it in the same breath logically refuted.

"She has told him," Jimmy said to himself. To Morales he said blandly:

"How do you do, señor? I came in to change a note."

"Ah, yes. Delighted to see you, Mr. Perry." Morales stuck out his hand with a great show of friendliness. "Some one—er—I heard you were leaving town. I am glad I was misinformed."

"I am leaving shortly," Jimmy said. "Got to go home and help lick the Germans." He mischievously put an entrapping question. "Mrs. Morales—she is well?"

"Yes—er—no, no. I am alarmed for her health, quite upset about it. And it has deprived me of the pleasure of entertaining you at dinner. I fear now——"

"Pray don't concern yourself for that," Jimmy entreated him. "Mrs. Morales' health is the thing we have to deplore. I was in hopes that she was recovered. It is needless to ask if Miss Taylor is well. She is the picture of health."

The banker did not have himself entirely in hand on this morning. His brows involuntarily contracted. He sought to counteract it with a voluminous smile.

"Miss Taylor will die of old age—unless

she meets with an accident," he asserted. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Perry? You have only to command me."

They were standing precisely at the spot where they had met. Morales made no move toward his private office. Jimmy was not the welcome guest of a former day, and he chuckled inwardly as he noted it.

"You are kind, señor, but there is nothing I could ask of you," he answered. "Oh, yes, there is," he supplemented quickly, under a devil's impulse: "just mention to Miss Taylor that you saw me, will you please? And that I sent her my most devoted regards."

Morales' little eyes gave him a needle-like glance. It was instantly hidden in an urbane inclination of his head.

"You will come again, I trust, Mr. Perry, before you leave the city," he murmured.

"Oh, most certainly, señor. I should grieve to think that we were not to meet again."

He returned the other's bow, and went out into the street.

"Now what the deuce made me send that word to the Taylor woman?" he questioned of himself irately. "I gave my hand away, and the old fox caught on to it."

IT WAS eleven o'clock. He had an hour to kill. He thought of dropping in on Ortega; if there was news to be learned that was the fountain-head. But he dismissed the notion. It was not in his rôle to be seen hobnobbing with the police. It occurred to him as he strolled down the west side of the plaza that he had come to town on a fool's errand. If Mary Taylor had imparted her suspicions to Morales, it was only a question of hours when an investigation would be instituted; and his utterly maladroit remark to the banker would hasten it. He would have better stayed at the hacienda and made ready for whatever came.

Jimmy was suddenly rooted to the pavement in frightened surprise. Winifred Brewer in an automobile was coming toward him—stopping—speaking low-voiced and hurriedly. It was not in their plan. Something had happened!

"Get in," she said. "Where is Billy?"

"At the legation. What——"

"Get in," she bade him curtly. "We have no time to lose. They have been out to the farm—two men. They will be going back with other men."

He was in beside her. But instead of speeding away she drove slowly up the Calle Central and into the Calle Grande eastward. They might have been riding for pleasure to all seeming.

"We mustn't look as if we are disturbed. Talk, laugh—anything."

She smiled as she said it.

"Where are you going?" he smiled back at her.

"To get Billy. We shall need him. Oh, if we have luck, and don't have to wait!"

Things that neither of them could afterward recall they chattered gaily about until they turned into the Calle Commercio. The luck for which Winifred had prayed was with them. Billy was coming out of the door as they approached the legation. He saw them and paused, his mouth dropping open, his nose twitching spasmodically.

"Don't ask questions. Jump in. Look pleased," Jimmy enjoined on him as they drove up.

They went on easily up the street toward the Calle Cristina. It took them past the German legation. It was a bit of bravado on Winifred's part. She could have chosen another way; but she was curious to see if there was any stir at the mission. Nothing, however, was apparent as they passed.

"Those chaps back there are sporting Kaiser Hogitall's rag today just as if everything was hunky with them," advanced Billy from the haze of his bewilderment.

He could not think of anything else to say, and he was forbidden a question.

His remark drew no reply. Winifred was turning into the cross street. She pressed the accelerator, and the car responded with quickened life. Soon they were on the Santa Marta Road. Winifred opened the throttle degree by degree until they were roaring south at forty miles an hour. The girl's hands were steady on the wheel. She "felt" the road like a veteran pacemaker.

"Now tell us!" exploded Jimmy. "'They' came. Who?"

Billy clutched the forward seat and leaned over to hear.

"Two Germans. From the legation. One's name was Landeker. Herr Kaufman called him by it. The other had his arm in a sling."

"Kaufman—they got to him?" Jimmy shouted his alarm.

"Wait," Winifred answered. "They came in a car." She glanced at her wrist-watch. "It was an hour ago. Father met them at the door. Sam was with him. They were in a furious mood—the Germans—and demanded the instant production of the minister. They knew, they said, that he was there. Father—oh, he was fine—pretended astonishment, indignation. He gave them no satisfaction. They attempted to force an entrance, and father drew his revolver. He said he would shoot the first man who came a step farther—and they knew he would do it! Sam stood with his white teeth bared, grinning at them like a wolf, and with one of those big pistols in his hand.

"It stopped them. Then one of them started running around the house, and by a hap took the east side. He cried out Herr Kaufman's name, kept crying it at every step, with words we could not understand—German. We heard Herr Kaufman answer from his window—'Herr Landeker;' and there was more German. But Sam put an end to it. He had run back through the hall when Landeker started, and he caught him under the window.

"What Sam said or did I don't know; but he came around the house with Landeker in his hold. Father motioned the man with the sling to get into his car, and Sam shoved the other in. And father and Sam covered them with their pistols until they were out of sight. Then I decided to come on at once and find you. I waited only until I was sure I wouldn't overtake those two on the road."

"I didn't think it would come so soon," Jimmy frowned. "I thought it would be in the night."

"Where were you during the time, Miss Winifred?" Billy asked.

"With father," she said simply.

"Of course," said Jimmy as simply.

She glanced at him, and away again at the ribbon of road before them. They were eating it up. Soon they would reach the ravine.

"Too bad we couldn't get word to Ortega about this; maybe he would send us help," commented Billy.

"The Government can't mix in it. You ought to know that," retorted Jimmy. "Any news at the legation?"

Billy gave a snort of disgust.

"Not a whisper. His eminency hadn't shown up yet, and if Whittaker knew anything he wouldn't spill it. He was sore at me for playing sick instead of telling him that I'd resigned. I had a frightful time screwing five dollars out of him on an I. O. U. He's so darned tight he'll pop and blow away one of these days."

Winifred laughed. It did Jimmy good to hear her. She was disturbed but not dismayed by the event of the morning. Brewer was right. She was not afraid. She was not that kind. He told her of Enrique's raid on the secret wireless.

"Ah, that was splendid!" she acclaimed. "Single-handed against three. He is brave."

They were at the pitch of the ravine, and she eased the car down.

"I say," broke out Billy, who had been scanning the sky to the west. "There's nasty weather making over yonder. Black as coal. Ever see it rain in this country, Jimmy—a cloud-burst?"

"I've only been here since Monday," Jimmy recalled to him.

"Huh. You've got something coming to you then. It can rain hard enough to drown a mule in one place, and two miles away they are eating dust. And it's all over in half an hour."

They splashed through the rivulet at the bottom of the gorge, and went up the other side. Two minutes later they were at the farmhouse door. Brewer was there to meet them. He stabbed a question at Jimmy.

"Is war declared?"

"By an overwhelming majority of both houses."

Brewer looked up at the flag over the door. A nebulous smile touched his face.

"We will raise it from the house-top," he said. "Let them come and haul it down."

## CHAPTER XXII

### DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES

ON THIS same afternoon of April sixth, *El Terror*, the flag and only fighting ship of the Zanhorian navy, lay drowsing at anchor behind the breakwater in the harbor of Puerto Mono. It had drowsed there weeks without end, except for a semi-occasional sally into the farther waters for frugal gun-practise.

Admiral Miguel Terrozas was ashore. He spent, indeed, most of his time ashore, having nothing to do when afloat but listen to his rusty anchor-chain grinding in its hawse-hole. Ashore there were matters to talk about, matters that of late had been whispered to him in secret corners by certain persons, and to which he had lent an attentive ear; for he perceived advantage to his personal renown and fortune in these confidences.

But on this afternoon Admiral Terrozas was receiving light in his darkened understanding, and the source of it, and the manner of it, whelmed him in astonishment and a waxing fear. He was seated in the port-warden's office overlooking the harbor. His companion was a woman—a dark, little woman in gray, with a quiet voice and a quiet way that somehow conveyed the effect of a vast authority speaking through her.

Admiral Terrozas was made to see that his personal fortunes lay on the upper side of the shelf instead of being suspended by a hair from the lower side. He was made to see that a long and powerful arm was ready to stretch down from afar to Zanhoria and knock mutinous heads together until the Isthmus should resound with it.

He was made to see the vision of an eventual United States of Central America founded not in strife but in the concord of mutual interests and aspirations and, incidentally, with a defensive navy that a brilliant sailor would have profit and pleasure in commanding. And, finally, Admiral Terrozas was made to see that to go out and intercept Peralta on his approach to the coast would be a very excellent way to avoid the adobe wall that waited in Cortina for the enemies of the republic.

In fine, Admiral Terrozas had been made to see in sharp relief which side his political bread was buttered on. When he left the port-warden's office he went immediately aboard his ship, and in half an hour was steaming for the open sea. The *Sea Bird* probably would lay a devious course for Puerto Mono, out of the regular lane of traffic; also, she might put in at a point above or below the port.

The admiral would patrol the coast in the hope that good fortune would place the yacht in his way, whether on this day, or the morrow, or the day after. And as chance, or Providence, would have it he laid his course south by east at first when with equal reason he might have laid it north by west.

Mrs. Isaacs, meanwhile, after watching *El Terror* clear the harbor, entertained herself at dinner in a retired café by the waterfront, and prolonged the meal to the extreme limit of gentility, for she had a wait of three hours to endure before her return train left for the capital.

STEAMING up the coast as *El Terror* steamed down it came the gunboat *Lincoln*. She was off Punta Gorda, and inshore in the territorial waters of Zanhoria. Less than four hours lay between her and Puerto Mono. She would drop anchor at ten if all went well. One bell in the second dog-watch had struck. The sea was bland as a moorland pond.

"Submarine on the starboard beam, sir. Just emerging. Distance about four thousand yards," called the lookout. On the heels of this came another call: "Steamer on the port bow, sir, rounding the point. A gunboat."

The *Lincoln* was agasp with astonishment. A submarine in these waters! Unless—it might be—an American boat.

A four-inch explosive shell screaming through the *Lincoln's* rigging settled the question. It burst a hundred yards away. The general alarm and torpedo defense bells rang out. Men jumped to their stations. The range-finders sent in their curt orders, and the forward guns spoke.

The U worked in nearer, shelling as she came, but without a hit. It was not afraid of this old slow-footed tub with guns no greater than its own. It could run circles around her. And this other old tub poking out from the point—blundering in where she had no business—would make off when she saw what was up. Terrozas knew where his interests lay.

Great spouts of water rose about the *Lincoln* from the falling shells, and around the U. Each was getting the range, and it was nip and tuck as to which would score the first hit. If the *Lincoln*, it would be all over with the enemy; if the U, it depended on where the shot struck.

Then from the boiling sea about the submarine a white streak darted forth with tremendous velocity. It circled a little to allow for the pitiful speed of the gunboat; but the submarine had not taken into account the gunboat's zigzag, and with a venomous *zip* the torpedo whizzed by twenty yards ahead of the mark.

The *Lincoln's* wireless was signaling the other gunboat. The quarter-deck had made her out, but could not understand her tactics. She had sheered off on a course that would bring her well to the north of the submarine. These were neutral waters; was the Zanhorian going to make no protest?

Terrozas kept his silent course. The U thought it understood him—he was simply going to quit the scene, and let his friends finish their work unhindered. His action could bear no other interpretation. But the old fool was taking a stupid risk. He might get a stray shot in his vitals from the American.

A shell from the U found the *Lincoln* at last. It plumped into her engine-room, killing two men, but did not explode. It smashed in the intermediate cylinder-head, however, and the boat lay crippled on the water. But her guns still spoke, and the submarine kept her distance. A shot had grazed its conning-tower and carried a man along with it.

And then something happened, and it was a miracle—no less.

*El Terror* was off the beam of the U now. The latter was preparing to launch a second torpedo—with long odds in its favor this time—when the Zanhorian gunboat let loose its entire starboard battery of three-pounders at the German. And it was a hit—that was the miracle of it—a hit the first time by a gun-crew that scarcely knew the smell of powder! The submarine rolled over and went down, with only a floating patch of stinking oil to mark where she had been.

Terrozas left the few men yet alive struggling in the water, and wore around to go to the *Lincoln's* aid. He had proved that he knew which side his bread was buttered on; and, besides, dead Germans tell no tales.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### UNVEILED

ENRIQUE stayed at home on Friday, as he had promised, for the message that was to come from Mary. He was up at ten o'clock, and after a breakfast he had no relish for, and a listless half-hour with the morning paper, he dawdled about the house in miserable suspense.

Don Luis Valera had gone away very early, the old butler informed Enrique, in answer to a note brought by a messenger who would deliver it into no hands other than the secretary's own. Enrique wondered a little what such an imperative summons foretold. Was the German legation making trouble? Well, let Don Luis attend to it; he had done his part, and had a broken head to show for it.

Since the quarrel with his uncle Enrique had exchanged with him only the perfunctory civilities demanded in the presence of the servants. They had dined together the night before in cold silence. Enrique had not mentioned his purposed attack on the wireless. If he failed, it would only be what Don Luis would have expected of him; and if he succeeded Don Luis would have small praise for him. He had called him a fool—let him remain in that belief.

The boy did not know that his uncle, apprized by Ortega of the dangerous task he had set for him, had lain awake listening for his home-coming, nor could he know that before leaving the house that morning Don Luis had softly looked in on him as he slept to reassure himself of his safety. He moped about from room to room, counting the time and chewing the cud of bitter reflection. His uncle—Jimmy—Ortega—were all in league against Mary. They persisted in reading her falsely, in manufacturing a character for her that was as far from truth as hell from heaven.

But as he recurred to the incident in the Calle Dolores he was compelled to acknowledge that it looked equivocal. It was part of an event to which, as yet, he did not hold the key. Mary had promised to supply it; but the day was wearing on, and there was no word from her. And it was a thing that demanded explanation. A woman could not hold silence in the face of the extraordinary situation in which she was found by the man who loved her. She would hasten to give a reason that should be at once sound and satisfactory. Why did Mary delay?

Enrique's forehead gathered into heavy furrows. He had told Mary that he would not ask an explanation. Would she rest on this? But no, of her own accord she had said she would send for him. He was to stay at home until he heard. Well, he was staying, and he did not hear. Why? It was two o'clock. Surely she must know the agony of his waiting.

He tried in a dozen ways to ease the passage of the hours, to create for himself an atmosphere of unconcern, of assured confidence in his ultimate deliverance from the suspense in which he was prisoned. All his devices failed—nothing mattered but this primal passion that was devouring him. At last he could endure the ache of it no longer. It was striking three. Six hours he had waited in a torture of expectancy. He would put an end to it.

He went to the telephone in the library, and called up Morales' house. They were an eternity in answering, but at length a woman's palpitant voice came to him on the wire. It was not Mary's; it was the Señora Morales' perhaps, or a maid's.

"I would like to speak, please, with Miss Taylor," he requested. "Say it is Señor Segovia."

There was a pause. Then the voice replied—

"Miss Taylor is not here, señor."

"She has gone out?"

"Yes, señor."

"When?"

"Hours ago—ten o'clock, or a little before it may have been."

"May I ask when you expect her back?"

"I can not say. I do not know, señor."

Enrique hung up the receiver. He sat for a long time gazing at the instrument as though it might, if it would, give answer to the questions that battered at his mind.

"She told me to wait—and she kissed me—she kissed me," he repeated over and over in a dull monotone.

He got up and walked the floor, walked it back and forth, from side to side, with dragging feet. And it was on him, in this endless chain of steps, that Don Luis entered, home for a brief hour in a day that would merge into another before he would see repose. He took in the young man's negligé attire, and his drawn face.

"You have not been out today?" he asked.

"No, sir," Enrique answered briefly.

He had left off his walk.

"You were hurt last night, Señor Ortega tells me. Are you in pain?"

"A bruise only. It does not inconvenience me."

Don Luis looked at him straightly, his eyes cynical and coldly disapproving. He said slowly:

"The man Mateo has been disciplined. He slept at his post. He did not see the other woman who left the house. Possibly Miss Taylor mentioned her to you?"

It was Don Luis' way of introducing a subject he intended to dispose of finally. But to Segovia it came as a ray of light athwart the gloom that filled him. It was a woman Mary had gone to see! His faith in her was born again. He returned his uncle's gaze, scornfully defiant.

"So they set a watch on her, and it failed! Why, sir, this is notable news. Two women meet for a purpose of their own. What the purpose, one would think was strictly their affair. But it seems not. A watch is set on them. They are dogged by a sneaking spy. One goes away unseen, and the other, whom I chanced to meet, is ill and I escort her home. A mystery, truly!"

DON LUIS studied him an intense moment. He was considering whether he should say the thing that was in his mind. He decided to defer it for the present. The boy was in the grip of an infatuation that was blinding him even to his honor, it might be. He would open his eyes first.

"You have not answered me," he said. "But it does not matter. Miss Taylor did not mention the woman to you. She did not tell you what happened to her in that house, engaged solely for the purpose of receiving her on that night. She had excellent reasons for not doing so. She wished to keep her hold on you, and to tell you would have destroyed it perhaps. There is no counting on what a man will do in your evil case."

"Sir!" Enrique's face flushed darkly. He made a threatening step toward his uncle, and checked himself. "You take advantage, your Excellency, of my obligations to you."

"You still have faith in this woman after what you saw last night—after what Mateo saw, and the man in the car with you?"

Don Luis thwacked him with the interrogatory as with a stick. Enrique flinched under it.

"Until I have a better reason to forego it," he returned sullenly.

"Let us begin, then." The secretary handed him a slip of paper. "Read it. It is the reply to a question asked by the

American minister of the *North American Gazette*. It would have been unnecessary to ask it today, with what we know."

The cablegram fluttered from Enrique's hand to the floor. He made no attempt to recover it, but stood staring at it, benumbed and voiceless. It read:

Unknown to us. We have no traveling contributors.

Don Luis was merciless.

"Well, do you still believe?" he demanded. "Are you the one sage in a rabble of fools?"

Enrique did not reply to him. He turned to the window, and he stood there gazing unseeingly into the street.

"A Judas kiss!" he cried from his riven soul. "It was a Judas kiss she gave me."

His uncle watched him a space, and spoke again.

"Her real name is Ella Prietz. She is of the German Intelligence Office. A spy! But she was outwitted at the last, and it was you who found her, defeated and discomfited, and coddled her to her home! Enrique, tell me: did she cajole from you our secret plans? Not that it matters now, but——"

Enrique wheeled about. His eyes were blazing.

"I am a fool, but not a traitor, Señor Don Luis Maria Santiago de Valera!"

The older man's expression softened.

"Yes, that I could not believe," he murmured. And to Enrique, his tone gentle and persuasive: "Sit down, my boy. I will tell you what has passed since the early hours of the day. Zanhoria has abandoned her neutrality. The call to action has come. But first I will say that the president is highly pleased with your performance at the German legation. He has a captain's commission for you. And I——"

Enrique made a violently impatient gesture.

"Where is she now?" he rasped. "Did they let her get away?"

"She is in Señor Ortega's charge. She was arrested as she was taking the Arraca train at two o'clock. She was at the legation until then."

"Ha! It is plain. Neiderlein was sending her to the camp to warn them of Kaufman's disappearance."

"Much more than that," said Don Luis gravely. "In the house in Dolores Street she was inveigled into giving information of General Peralta's plans. She believed she was talking to a confederate spy; but there was one thing she held back. It was Peralta's written list of the conspirators, and intended only for Herr Kaufman's eye. That was taken from her with other papers. A glass of wine—and it was done. All the papers were in Mr. Lane's hands in half an hour afterward."

"I understand now." Enrique's face reflected the mocking thoughts that besieged him. "But this other woman; who is she, where did she come from?"

Señor Valera smiled faintly. It indexed his complacency with the turn of events.

"She is known as a Mrs. Rebecca Isaacs of New York. She is in reality a United States Secret Service agent, and she was sent to Jamaica to run down the rumor of Peralta's proposed *coup*. Women succeed better than men in these things oftentimes. Mrs. Isaacs established the truth of the rumor, and she went further: she gained her way into Peralta's confidence. How, one can only imagine—but her German is fluent, and her Spanish, and her plainness disarms any thought of feminine intrigue.

"At all events she learned many things and among them that this Miss Prietz was the bearer of an important document to Herr Kaufman. Mrs. Isaacs managed to get a strong letter from Peralta to Morales, and she came on to Cortina with the pretext of helping to forward the uprising. She called immediately at the German legation as a confidential agent of Peralta; and it was she who conveyed the stolen dispatch from Morales to Herr Kaufman yesterday morning. Morales asked her to be his messenger."

Enrique looked his astonishment.

"She played into their hands?"

"My dear boy, she knew Morales would tell Miss Prietz. It strengthened the position Mrs. Isaacs was planning to assume with the woman. And Herr Kaufman would have had from Morales a *précis* of the note in any event." He added: "All of the conspirators will be arrested within the hour."

"Jimmy Perry can let Kaufman go now," remarked Enrique in a heavy voice.

He was thinking of what Jimmy would say when he should be acquainted with these facts.

"We shall send word word to him tonight," said Don Luis. "Perhaps you will be the one to go."

"No! I—I would rather not," protested the young man vehemently. "Send some one else. I must decline. I have something that will engage me here in Cortina."

His uncle did not combat him, for he fancied he understood his objection.

"Oh, as you choose, my boy," he agreed good-humoredly. "Señor Ortega can find another messenger."

Enrique made him a preoccupied gesture. His gaze was remote—absorbed, black and deadly. Don Luis saw only that his nephew was cured of his passion, and he went out well contented with the interview.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A SEMI-UNDERSTANDING

THEY were busy at the hacienda. The Germans might return at any time. Tia Matilde, in the outdoor kitchen, was boiling eggs and a great ham in anticipation of a possible siege that would preclude the use of the stove.

Tio Diego was getting a short ladder from the stable to be set up in the house under the skylight. He was going about this business with many a shake of his gray poll in fearful speculation on what these extraordinary events in which he was enmeshed portended.

In the dining-room Winifred was setting out a lunch, and marshaling her stores of tinned goods in the pantry ready to hand. Sam was helping her, with a watchful eye on the open slide of Herr Kaufman's door across the hall. Jimmy was in there, having been summoned by the prisoner for a parley.

Brewer and Billy had gone to the woods in search of a sapling that would answer for a flagstaff. Brewer was curiously bent on this project. Before the boys' return from Cortina he had hunted up some iron braces to secure the pole to the coaming of the skylight. The house was tiled, and the coaming offered the only vantage-point for his purpose. A ladder from the inside would give safe access to it. The two were coming back now.

"We will have to hurry, sir," Billy was saying. "Those clouds over there are getting a gait on."

"It won't take us long," Brewer answered. "Ten minutes will do."

"But the halyards. It will take time to rig the pole."

"We won't need halyards. We are going to nail our colors to the mast."

Billy glanced at him. The look in the man's face sent a tingle up his spine.

"I see," he said softly.

They did not speak again until they were in the house.

"If we had a pair of glasses we might pick out something up there," suggested Billy when they had taken the flag down from over the front door, and were preparing to mount the ladder. We might get a good look up the Santa Marta road."

"We might," agreed Brewer.

He stepped into his room and returned with a binocular field-glass. The hall was high-studded, and the ladder did not reach the ceiling by three feet. It was an ancient and shaky affair. Diego steadied it, and from the top rung they were able to draw themselves up by the skylight casing on to the roof. Diego passed the pole to them, and they fell to at their work.

Jimmy came out from his talk with Kaufman. He spied Winifred in the dining-room, and stopped at the door. She was fetching something from the pantry to the table. With an eager gesture she bade him enter.

"What did he have to say?" she queried.

Jimmy glanced around. Kaufman's eyes were at the slide. He was listening. Jimmy calmly closed the door on him.

"He said a lot of things," he replied. "I reckon you wouldn't care to hear some of them. They were not exactly drawing-room remarks."

The girl placed the dish she held on a tray on which were other dishes. She called Sam from the pantry.

"Take it in to Herr Kaufman," she directed. She added austerely—

"If he shrugs at it bring it immediately away, as you did this morning."

Sam grinned knowingly and departed with the tray. Jimmy's blue eyes glinted.

"Kaufman was unmannerly about it this morning?" he asked.

She nodded.

"But tell me what he said. Why did he send for you?"

"Boiled down, it was to demand his instant release under penalty of violence from the legation staff."

"He meant that we would be attacked?"

"Yes. War to the knife. You know—'blood and iron.' That sort of thing."

"You smile. You don't take it seriously," she taxed him.

"Yes, I do; but one might as well smile as cry. And it's not so disfiguring to the features."

She smiled herself now.

"Well, what did you say to him?"

"Nothing much. I reminded him that as he had set the example of violating the neutrality laws we felt at liberty to follow in his distinguished footsteps. And I intimated that we were very well prepared to extend a warm reception to any of his friends who might consider it advisable to come for him."

"Is that all?" as he paused.

"The sum of it. Kaufman made a comment in German when I was leaving. I don't know German, so I decided to accept it as the expression of a profound interest in my hereafter, and bowed myself away."

A small laugh escaped Winifred—his manner was so entirely at variance with the gravity of the situation.

"I like you that way," he put forth quickly. "May I say it? It makes me feel that we are getting to be friends, not just companions in a cause."

The smile left her face. Her dark eyes regarded him with a melancholy that moved him to a great compassion, for he guessed the origin.

"I think I answered that the other day," she said, her voice low. "Won't you please let it rest that way?"

But he was not content to do this until he was assured that her objections were not based on grounds other than those he guessed. He discovered an urge in him to put the issue to the test.

"YOU are not fair to me," he told her in warm protest. "I am not lightly asking for your friendship. And at this time, when—when things may happen—I wouldn't intrude the question if it did not mean a great deal to me."

He reddened with the avowal, and went on, blundering sadly in his confusion.

"I—I haven't had much to do with girls only in a sort of passing way—at college—places like that—just funning with them. Perhaps I'm not the kind to win a girl's friendship, though I haven't thought about that—not till now. You see, I've been busy with other things a lot—in father's office for one thing, getting the hang of the business, and——"

"Oh, don't go on. Don't." Winifred stopped him with a little outflinging of her hands. "It is not that—not you. Any girl would want you for a friend. Only I—I must deny myself your friendship. I can not reach up to it. I—I am not worthy of it."

She bowed her head, standing before him in humble abasement. His heart contracted with the pity of it.

"I will not believe that," he disputed fiercely. "No one can make me believe it, and least of all yourself. Some circumstance, some condition you were powerless to prevent has been forced on you. I do not ask what it is; I do not care what it is; and whatever it is it could not affect my regard for you. A man knows when he stands in the presence of goodness, and I know it now. Some one is coming! Will you take me as your very faithful friend—Winifred?"

His eyes were insistent upon her. In answer—slowly, falteringly—her hand rose from her side and went out to his. And yet she did not wholly yield. She cried out:

"Ah, you make me! How can I refuse? But it is only until we are done here with what we have to do—only until then. Afterward, it must end."

It was Sam coming back from Kaufman that Jimmy had heard. The interruption did not irk him. He was well satisfied to let his reply to Winifred wait; for, in truth, there was no reply ready to his tongue. It was only a semi-understanding he had achieved, but it was something. "Afterward!" It was yet to come, and hope lives in the tomorrow.

Sam's white teeth showed in the ebon setting of his face as he entered the dining-room. The tray was not in evidence.

"Mister Coughem ain't so rambunctious 'bout his vittels dis time, Miss Winny," he announced.

"Oh, he has changed his mind since morning, has he, Sam?"

"Yes'm. I reckon he beginnin' ter feel kinder sharp-set 'long 'bout now. But he play off fust dat he ain't got no int'res' in w'at I'se a-bringin' him. I make, des as you tol' me, fer de do'. He say: 'Hey, whar you gwine wif dat tray?' Dey ain't ezactly de words he say, but dat's w'at dey specify. I say: 'I'se gwine ter tote it whar it come fum, an' dey ain't a nudder tray a-comin' in yere arter dis. I'se done got nuff ter do 'sides triflin' time erway runnin' in an' outer yere on a fool bizness.'

"Wif dat, he make a motion fer me ter set de tray down. I done did it, an' I waits eroun' a spell twell I see he ain't gwine ter turn up his nose at w'at you fixed fer him, Miss Winny. But he don't have nuffin' mo' ter say, 'cept in dat outerlandish lingo he make talk wif ter himse'f; an' so I come erway an' leave him whar he is."

The room, while Sam was speaking, had taken on a strange livid hue. Jimmy went to a window and looked out. The storm Billy had prophesied was about to break. Gusts of scorching air blew in on him. In the yard old Tia Matilde was hurriedly stripping a clothes-line of certain household linens she had washed in the early hours of the day. A blinding flash of lightning sent Jimmy staggering back from the window.

"I'm not fond of fireworks," he said with a forced smile. "Not that kind. And coming on top of that quake last night it makes me skittish. Hadn't we better see to the windows on the west?"

"Yes. Close these in here, please. I will look after the others. Sam, go out and close the shutters on this side."

Winifred sped away, and Sam hastened off on his mission. Jimmy saw to the windows in the dining-room, and went out into the hall. Tio Diego was steadying the ladder for Billy, who was scrambling down without any nice regard to his footing. He was panicky, and confessed it.

"That last flash! Gosh, I could feel it to my boots," he gulped. "You don't smell any brimstone about me, do you?"

"Father! Why doesn't he come down? It is raining great sheets in the valley. We will get it in another minute."

It was Winifred. She had run out of the last west room, and was anxiously questioning Billy.

"He stopped to have another look with the glass. You can see the road for miles up there. We'd furled the flag—be whipped to pieces if we hadn't—when that flash came. I didn't wait to say good-by. But Mr. Brewer just stood there looking up the road like a boy watching for the circus. Say, Miss Winifred, your father is a cool hand all right. The kind to have."

In the crepuscular light bred by the onrushing tempest Jimmy could not see the cross-fire of emotions pictured in the girl's face; but he could fancy how they battled there—pride and pain, and with victory aloof from either. Could Brewer ever give back that which he had taken from her?

The man was coming in from the roof, the binocular swung from a strap about his neck. He paused on the upper rounds of the ladder to lower the wings of the skylight, and barely in time. A flying wave of water dashed in on him, and sprayed those below. Brewer was drenched to the skin; but he finished his work. Then he came down.

THE storm swooped bellowing about the rock-built house. The rain drove by in solid walls, and the darkness of night was in the hall. Diego crossed himself, and muttered what he could remember of his prayers. None of them gave a thought to Kaufman in his solitary confinement a few feet away. Brewer shouted above the turmoil to Sam:

"Light the lamp. Let us see what we are about here."

But Jimmy was already at the lamp, and presently the enfolding gloom was relieved. Winifred's hand lay upon her father's arm, and she was urging him to his room.

"You must change your clothes," she said, putting her mouth close to his ear to make him hear. "You will take cold."

Her solicitude, warm and pressing, was new to him. His pale face flushed under it and, with a sort of timidness that brought a kindred flush to his daughter's cheek, he laid his hand on hers and kept it there. He bent his head to her.

"I am all right," he told her. "It won't hurt me to wait, and I've something to say when I can."

He unslung the glasses and dropped them in a chair.

They stood, all of them silently listening to the uproar without. After a little the first fury of it abated. It grew lighter. The thunder rolled away into the distance. The wind fell. The rain came down no longer in bucketfuls but in measured lenity. In half an hour the sun would be smiling on the water-swept earth.

"I wanted to tell you," Brewer said when at last he could make himself heard in an ordinary tone, "that my glass discovered an open car coming from Cortina. It was filled with men."

"The Germans!" ejaculated Jimmy. "How far off was it?"

"I should say about three miles. They may not be the Germans, but we won't be caught napping at any rate. We are ready for them."

"They'll have a merry time getting over here," derided Billy. "The ravine is a raging river by this. We are not getting the full force of this rain; it started in the lowland. It will be hours before they can cross, if they haven't turned back. What do you say, Tio? This isn't the first time you've seen a cloudburst here."

He addressed the old man in Spanish. They talked at some length, and Jimmy noticed that Billy was frowning and his nose twitching fitfully. He cut Tio Diego off with a curt gesture and spoke to Brewer.

"He says there's a foot-bridge down the ravine about a mile, where it turns south. It's rocky there, and high and narrow. That's what piles the water up so when it rains. The Indians built the bridge years ago, Diego says. It was pretty shaky the last time he saw it, but you could get across."

"If they know about it," Jimmy interjected. "Perhaps they don't."

"I think," said Brewer quietly, "we had better go on the supposition that they do know about it. Anyway, they are likely to explore the ravine before giving up."

"In this rain?" objected Jimmy.

Billy jeered at him.

"Rain? A German isn't afraid of water on the outside of him; it's on the inside he kicks at."

"But the car. What will they do with it?"

"Run it in the bushes off the road until they are ready to go back."

Brewer smiled in a set, stern way.

"Perhaps," he remarked, "they won't go back. At least, not with Kaufman. Sam, go around the house and close every shutter. We won't have time for it if they try to rush us. And we'd better have lunch right away, Winny. I'll be with you in five minutes."

He drew his arm from the girl's hold on it, very gently, and went into his room.

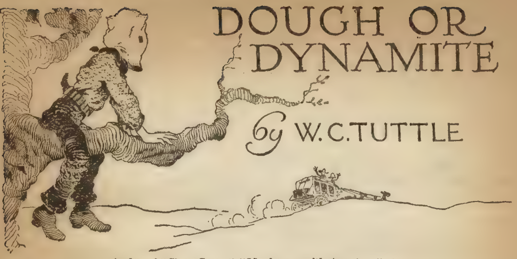
"My heavenly home!" exclaimed Billy as the door shut. "If I was an insurance agent I'd hate to have popper Kaufman for a risk. Not if he started to cut up with Mr. Brewer about."

He did not laugh. He was in sober earnest. Jimmy's eyes sought Winifred's, but there was a faraway look in hers that did not take him in. She murmured something about seeing Tia Matilde, and slipped away down the hall.

TO BE CONCLUDED

# DOUGH OR DYNAMITE

## by W. C. TUTTLE



*Author of "Clean Crazy," "Monkeying with Ancestors," etc.*

ME AND "Muley" Bowles and "Chuck" Warner are putting a saddle on a colt in the Cross J corral, when "Telescope" Tolliver enters the precincts of said ranch, and we gets our first glimpse of Archibald Ames.

Archibald occupies a seat on the buckboard with Telescope, and they soon comes over and climbs on top of the corral fence. Archibald's name fits him—in a way. The length of his first name indicates his girth and his last name his height. He's one of them persons who you'd never invite to set down, 'cause he don't seem to require no such posture.

It takes him quite a long time to negotiate the top-pole of the corral, and when he does get up there he has to balance—his feet won't reach the next pole. He's wearing them dinky little pants, with the seat of a shoplifter and the knees of Lord Fauntleroy. His calves perspire in shiny leggings, and for a hat he wears a libel on the name of Stetson.

Muley gives him a passing glance, yanks up another notch on the cinch, and grunts—

"What'll we do with it?"

"Love it to death or render it out," grunts Chuck. "Looks to me like one of them playthings for kids that yuh can't tip over and make it stay down. Let's give this colt a chance to breathe, while we peers a little closer at this attraction."

We ambles over and looks up at the critter's soles.

"Mister Ames," orates Telescope, "I'm obliged to make yuh used to Muley Bowles. He's the sylph-like critter in woolly chaps. That one with the sad, horse-faced features is Chuck Warner, the anti-George Washington of Yaller Rock County, and the other person down there is Henry Peck. They're all harmless.

"Bunch, this is Mister Archibald Ames, who is to be with us for a spell."

"I'm pleased to meet yuh," smiles Archie.

"You ought to be," agrees Muley. "It ain't often that we shows this much interest in a stranger. What seems to bring yuh hither?"

"I brung him," states Telescope. "Mister Ames is looking for local color. Sabe?"

"What's he done, and is he wanted by Federal, State or county?" asks Chuck, serious-like, wiggling his ears.

Chuck can wiggle his ears just like a mule.

"Done what?" grunts Telescope. "Chuck, you boob, don't yuh know what local color is?"

"I'll bite," grins Chuck. "Go ahead and spring it, Telescope."

Telescope clears his throat, rolls a cigaret and glares at Chuck, who glares right back, and wiggles his ears.

"Look at them ears!" applauds Archibald. "I'd love to get a close-up of them."

"Mister," reproves Chuck, "it ain't seemly that a stranger should set on top of a corral and make remarks about the physical failings of a native son. Keep on at the pace you've started, and that spell that Telescope spoke about can be spelled in four letters: g-o-n-e. Sabe?"

"You got a lot to say about it, now ain't yuh?" reproves Telescope. "You ain't nothing around here but a forty-dollar puncher. You got a lot of chance to tell visitors where to head in. Come on, Mister Ames, and we'll go up and see the man what owns this ranch, and ain't no more sense than to pay forty dollars to a runt like that."

They climbs down and goes up to the ranch-house.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" whoops Muley, shaking every ounce of his two hundred and forty pounds of bone and lard. "Haw! Haw! 'Come on, Mister Ames, and we go up to see the man'—haw, haw, haw! You will tell folks where to head in at, will yuh?"

Muley is a poet. There might 'a' been as good rhymers as him once upon a time, but they're all dead and departed. Muley is the he-buzzard of the flock right now. He hangs on to the side of the corral and wipes the tears out of his eyes.

"Gosh!" he snorts. "Telescope sure showed his breeding, Chuck. Yuh could tell he's been well raised. Sticks his chin up in the air, like a grouse with a goiter, and proclaims: 'Come on with me, Mister Ames.' Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Some day I'm going to reach up and hang my fist on his jaw," proclaims Chuck.

"You better catch him in bed or carry a ladder with yuh," says I. "You got ambition, Chuck, but your height ain't noways adequate."

A little later old man Whittaker, who owns the Cross J outfit, comes out with Archibald, and them two goes back to town in the buckboard. Telescope comes down to the bunk-house and sets down in our midst.

Chuck gives him a mean look, and goes on playing solitaire. Telescope admires himself in our cracked shaving-mirror.

"Better fix your features in your mind, Telescope, 'cause you're sure going to need a pattern after Chuck gets through with yuh," laughs Muley.

"That banty little ear-wiggler!" snorts Telescope. "I got a feeling that I ain't going to punch cows much longer."

"Dead men punch no cows," states Chuck. "Your perceptions are getting clearer."

"Where do yuh feel bad, Telescope?" I asks. "Tell papa where it hurts."

"Aw ——!" Telescope turns from the mirror and glares at us. "I'm glad I'm going to get away from you half-wits."

"Has the old man been kicking on yuh wasting so much time over at the Bowers ranch, holding hands with Miss Amy, or has that tumble-bug yuh had down to the corral been whispering sweet nothings in your ear?" asks Chuck.

"YOU leave Miss Bowers' name out of it!" snaps Telescope. "Mister Ames is a moving-picture man, and I may cease punching the festive cow to play hero parts for him. Me and him have had quite some conversation regarding same, and he assures me that I've got the physique and features for a lead."

"You got the physique and features for a funeral if yuh don't quit wearing my red tie," says I. "That's right—throw it on the floor. If yuh wants to make a hit with folks, why don't yuh buy some clothes of your own?"

"Tell us all about it, little one," begs Muley, resting his fat chin on his hands, and squinting at Telescope.

"Sing us a song of a locoed man,  
  Who got stuck on your face and shape—  
A form that was built by accident,  
  And the face of a jungle ape.  
Sing us a song of a keeper bold,  
  Who went sound asleep one day,  
A keeper who's going to show up soon,  
  And lead little Archie away."

"I'll tell yuh nothing!" yelps Telescope. "You fellers are just plumb ignorant."

"Ain't it true?" nods Chuck. "I'd take a job, too, if I was begged."

"You!" snorts Telescope. "Haw, haw, haw! Mister Ames told me that if he wanted something for the public to laugh at he'd sure hire you. No, Chuckie. This is a moving picture—not a sideshow."

"Here's the idea," continues Telescope. "Mister Ames wants something real. He wants real punchers and——"

"Ninety-eight cents in Chicago," nods Chuck. "I seen in a mail-order catalog where yuh could get good ones for——"

"He wants a real hold-up," states Telescope. "He wants a stage held up, and he don't want no fake. Sabe? Somehow he's got the idea that I could do it artistic-like."

"Your experience will help yuh out," nods Chuck. "There was a hold-up over in Mexican Cañon once, and the feller——"

"Sufficient, Chuck!" snorts Muley, and Chuck winks at me.

"Well, of course it wasn't done by one man," murmurs Chuck. "One of the posse shot the horns off a animile and made a muley. Correct me if I appear to be wrong."

"You stand corrected," states Muley. "Desist from historical romance, or I'll remember one Summer afternoon down in Cottonwood, when a certain man went into a bank, and——"

"I accepts the correction," admits Chuck, playing a red queen on a red king, and Telescope continues:

"You fellers keep this under your hats. Sabe? Along about Wednesday afternoon I'm going to hold up the stage from Piperock. Of course after it's over I'll return everything, and all the while this picture will be taken. He wants to advertise it as a real hold-up, and she will be all that."

"Going south, as she drags out of Hell Gate Crossing," orates Chuck.

"That's the designated place," grins Telescope. "You must 'a' been studying the situation, Chuck."

"Suppose somebody takes a shot at yuh?" I suggests. "Art Miller ain't no suckling infant, and if there's a shipment from the Golden Cross aboard there might be a guard."

"Yuh never can tell about them shipments," agrees Chuck. "I've tried several times to find out."

"No wonder yuh know a good place," laughs Telescope. "Never mind, there ain't going to be no shooting. I'll have 'em buffaloed. My shells will all be blanks. If I makes good in this I cinches a job with Archibald Ames, and it's good-by to the Cross J. No more will Mister Tolliver ride the hills and smell of burnt hair and corrals. Poor, eh? I'll be eating breakfast in bed while Chuck Warner is out chopping holes in the ice so the doggies can drink."

"A little more such talk and yuh won't have to be a actor to get breakfast in bed," states Chuck. "Keep it up, and you'll have all your meals in bed. If you wants to hear me say what I think about you being a actor you got to come outside. I got too much respect for the bunk-house to express myself here."

This day being Monday, we has to put up with that kind of conversation until Tuesday afternooon, when Chuck opines that he's going up to Piperock. Chuck can't stand prosperity, and Tuesday is payday. He's a roulette fiend, and he runs into bad luck every time he bucks a wheel in Paradise, so he wearies his bronc with monthly trips to Piperock. Once he won eight dollars up there. It cost him forty but he never figured that side of the ledger.

Anyway we wishes him many happy returns of the day, and he lopes away. As he forks his bronc he grins at Telescope, and says:

"To be a good actor, yuh got to imagine you're the party you're imitating. Just think you're 'Slippery' Silverton, Telescope. He's a good pattern to go by. Sabe?"

Slippery sure ain't no imitation. He's had the Montana officers buffaloed for so long that they think he's more than one man. The accumulated rewards for him look like the weekly clean-up at the U. S. mint.

Me and Muley wishes to see the proceedings, so we rides down to Paradise the next day with Telescope, and has converse with Archibald Ames. He squints at the sky and shakes his head.

"I doubt it," says he. "Too cloudy. Yuh can't get snappy stuff in atmosphere like this, and there can't be no retake. We'll let her go until tomorrow. I may set up after a while and get some character stuff. Lots of local color around here. Good characters, and the background is great. Know what I mean?"

"Perfectly," says I. "Sheep-herders and so forth."

Telescope opines that old man Bowers' ranch is calling him, so a little later on he rides away. Me and Muley horns into a poker game, and about an hour later Archibald Ames invades the place and leans against the bar. Mike Pelly leaves the table to serve him, but Archie ain't dry. He asks a question—

"Can you tell me where I can get some raw beef?"

He turns to us, and we sees the most wonderful black eye yuh ever seen.

"Holy henhawks!" I snorts. "What yuh been doing?"

"I'll tell yuh," snorts "Doughgod" Smith, from the doorway. "He's been exhibiting his danged ignorance. He opines to get a picture of a shepherd and he picked me!"

"Doughgod ain't no shepherd," I explains to Archie.

"This is a —— of a time to tell me," wails Archie, and he goes across the street to a restaurant.

The next we sees of him he's taking a picture of a rackful of broncs and then he goes over and photygrafts a greaser kid and a dog.

ME AND Muley donates as much as we can to Mike's game, and then quits. We wanders down to Art Miller's barn, and sets down in the sun. We haven't been there long, when we sees the stage drive up to the depot. They dumps some stuff off, and then drives down to the barn. Beside Art is old man Warner's son Chuck, and when he sees us he grins all over his homely face. Art sees us, and they both whoops.

"Awful funny," says Muley. "Haw, haw!"

"Any time yuh don't think it was yuh got another think coming," whoops Chuck, hanging on to a front wheel. "Haw! Haw! Haw! Left the danged fool up a—haw, haw, haw—tree!"

Art leans against one of his wheelers, and the tears runs out of his eyes.

"Some—haw, haw, haw—picture!" gargles Art. "I ain't laughed so much in my whole life!"

Him and Chuck looks at each other, and busts out laughing again.

"What seems to be tickling yuh?" asks Muley. "Is it a secret?"

"Oh, glory!" gasps Chuck. "Listen, you fellers. That's going to be some picture. Telescope held up that stage, but nobody will ever see that picture. Haw! Haw! Haw! We drives out of the crossing, and he stops us, just like a regular bandit. Of course we know he's got blanks in his gun, but we elevates our hands to make the play good. He's got a sack over his head, so yuh can't see his face, and I got a false mustache on so he won't know me. I made it myself.

"Well, we kicks the express box off, and sudden-like goes for our guns. He must 'a' been dreaming to let us get the drop thataway. We makes him throw his gun in the river. Haw! Haw! Haw!

"Then we makes him put the box back on the stage," whoops Art. "After he gets that done we makes him walk down to the river, and get a big rock. Then we marches him back and makes him put it on the empty boot. He made ten trips after boulders. Then we makes him dance a while, crawl all the way around the outfit on his hands and knees, and to finish up we made him climb up an old cottonwood snag, and he's there when we drives out of sight, with our thumbs at our noses at him. Haw! Haw!"

"Wait 'till I see Telescope," promises Chuck, weak-like.

"Haw!" says Muley. "He'd admire to hear it, Chuck. He was here until a while ago, and went over to Bowers'."

"Here? Telescope?" squeaks Chuck.

"Uh-huh," says I. "It was too cloudy, so we postponed taking that picture."

Art and Chuck looks foolish-like at each other and then at us.

"Well!" says Chuck "I don't sabe this."

"That's the trouble with you, Chuck," opines Muley. "Art don't have much sabe either. I reckon you fellers had about ten thousand easy dollars crawling around your stage on its hands and knees, and just to show your contempt for it yuh rode away with your thumbs at your nose and your fingers wiggling at it."

"Sus-slippery Silverton!" stutters Chuck. "That sure was Slippery! Ain't we the dangdest fools on earth!"

"By a majority of two," agrees Muley. "Telescope will be delighted."

"My ——!" gasps Art. "Slippery Silverton! I think that box had a shipment from the Golden Cross. What a chance I took!"

"All the way from Piperock," says I, but I don't think Chuck got it—he was beyond words.

Me and Muley went up and had a drink, and Muley laughs so hard that he forgot to pay for it. We meets Art a little later on but there ain't much fun joshing him about it.

"It's on Chuck," says he. "He explains the joke to me, and as she's pulled off as per schedule I thinks it's all right."

"But it spoils things for Telescope," says I. "You knowing about it spoils the hold-up. It might look like a fake. Sabe?"

"That's right," agrees Art. "Telescope is a friend of mine and—I got it! I'll make out that I don't feel good, and I'll ask 'Ricky' Henderson to drive for me. He wants to come down anyway."

"That's fine," says Muley. "Telescope will make it right with you, and we won't tell him about today."

That night we don't have neither Telescope or Chuck with us. Telescope is just riding away as we come in, and we don't have a chance to talk with him, and Chuck don't come home, 'cause he's too danged ashamed to face Telescope.

The next morning the old man sends me and Muley over to the Triangle to get some cows that Johnny Myers brought out of the Sleeping Crick Hills with some of his, and we misses the picture-taking. We travels as fast as we can, but the stage has gone past when we hits the main road on our way back. There ain't nobody at the Hell Gate crossing, so we pilgrims on to the ranch.

About an hour later Telescope comes in, and a little later Chuck drifts home.

"There seems to be a Jonah on this job," states Telescope.

"What yuh limping about, Telescope?" asks Chuck.

"Hurt my knee. Reckon it's a good thing the stage didn't come down today, 'cause I'd 'a' been a cripple in that picture. Slipped on a rock."

"Stage didn't come down?" I asks, and Telescope shakes his head.

"Nope. Me and Mister Ames was there for two hours after the time, but she don't show up."

"Didn't come down?" wonders Chuck, aloud. "Didn't go to Paradise?"

"She sure didn't. Hadn't been there when I left."

Chuck looks foolish-like, and gets busy reading an old magazine. I notices that he's got it upside down, but his lips are moving, so I reckon it don't matter. He's restless, and don't sleep well that night.

The next morning, right after breakfast, up rides Bill McFee, our unworthy sheriff; Ricky Henderson, Art Miller and Al McGuire, who manages the ground work of the Golden Cross. Telescope limps over to greet them, and they seems a heap interested in Telescope's walk.

"What do yuh think, Ricky?" asks McFee.

"I'd hate to swear to it, Bill, but he limped."

"I arrests yuh in the name of the law for robbing the Piperock stage yesterday, Telescope," states Bill.

Telescope looks foolish-like at Bill, and then laughs.

"Yesterday, Bill? Why, it never——"

"The description covers yuh," states Bill. "I got your pardner, who calls himself Archibald Ames, in jail. He's already admitted the intent to rob it, but says if you robbed it he don't know nothing about it. Said he was late meeting yuh, so he don't know what yuh might 'a' done."

"Whoever done it got seven thousand in that box," states McGuire.

"Seven thousand!" wonders Telescope. "I thought the clean-up was brought down yesterday."

"Some folks did," grins McGuire. "We figured to double-cross some wise folks."

I hears a deep breath, and Chuck sets down hard on the step. Old man Whittaker comes out, and they has to chaw the whole thing over again.

"Well," says the old man, "I don't think that Telescope done it, but under the circumstances I reckon he'll have to go to jail."

"At least yuh can have breakfast in bed," consoles Muley, and then he recites:

"A man in jail don't have no cares;
  The flight of time don't bother him,
There ain't no place for him to go,
  The passing hours lightly skim.
The judge may say, 'A year or two,
  In places where they don't need clocks,'
But you should care—when you get loose,
  You've seven thousand in that box."

"Muley, when I get loose I'm going to cut your rhymer square in two," proclaims Telescope, and just then the old man leads Telescope's bronc up, and he rides away with the posse.

WE'RE sad. Doggone, it sure is a sad sight to see our compatriot in the hands of the law. We smokes a while, and then I turns to Chuck—

"Where is that seven thousand, Chuck?"

He looks, queer-like, at me for a moment, and shakes his head.

"Danged if I know, Hen."

"You had it, didn't yuh?"

"Nope. Listen; I held up that stage before it got to the ford. Sabe? I was going to chase Ricky away and drive it myself. Figured I'd have some fun with Telescope. Sabe? Well, I scared —— out of Ricky. He ain't got no nerves anyway, and——"

"Wait!" yelps Muley. "Do you mean to set there and tell us that you scared Ricky so bad that he didn't know your physique from Telescope's? How about the limp?"

"Don't rush me!" snaps Chuck. "Telescope was so cocky about that picture stuff that I figured to have some fun. Did yuh ever walk on stilts? Well, I did when I was a kid. I made me a pair that just filled my boots, and pulled a flour sack over my head. Limp?

"Of course I'd limp. I danged near fell on my face when I yelled for him to stop. I made him get out and walk back up the road, and told him if he stopped I'd perforate him. I took the box off the seat, which I figured was that shipment, and looks her over. On it in big letters she proclaims to be dynamite. I lays that box back on the seat, gets my stilt tangled in a wheel, and fell plumb off the grade.

"Well, the team ran away, that's all I know. I figured that Ricky would stop 'em—they wasn't running fast."

"What kind of a looking box?" asks Muley.

"Wooden box with two ends and four sides. Regular dynamite box."

"Well described," applauds Muley. "All we got to find is a wooden box, with two ends and four sides."

Art Miller comes back in about an hour for some things of Telescope's, and we talks it over with him.

"Must 'a' been Telescope or the party what held her up that other time," says he. "The feller that me and Chuck fussed around with didn't have no limp."

"Maybe the exercise that you and Chuck gave him made him stiff and sore," I suggests, and Art grins. "Maybe. Funny thing about that hold-up. After that feller helps himself he must 'a' scared that team, 'cause they runs away and scatters things all the way up to 'Mighty' Jones' place, where they smashes a front wheel on a stump and stops.

"Ricky says there was a box of dynamite from the Golden Cross, the same of which he holds careful in the seat. He said that he was meek when held up, 'cause he was afraid that feller might shoot into that box. That box is a goner, and it's a wonder it didn't blow that outfit to thunder—unless that's the treasure-box."

Art pilgrims back towards town, and we all starts for the corral.

"Where yuh going?" asks Muley.

"After some dynamite dough," says all three of us together.

We rides up and down that road from the ford to Mighty's place, but we don't find nothing. We stops at the old Soda Springs trail, which shows fresh tracks. By mutual consent we turns up the trail. About half a mile up the crick we discovers a camp.

We recognizes old "Frenchy" Timmons as the party humped over the fire, tossing flapjacks, so we rides up and greets him. He's got a couple of moth-eaten burros nosing around his little tent. Frenchy is so crooked that he's suspicious of himself. He's one of them kind of prospectors what goes around with the feeling that every man what speaks kindly to him is laying to beat him out of the next strike he makes. He looks up through a decade of whiskers and grunts a greeting.

"How's your stock of location notices holding out, Frenchy?" asks Muley. "For a man with only two burros you can make more 'discoveries' than any sourdough I ever seen."

"Yah-h-h-h!" gurgles Frenchy, way back in the whiskers. "I find heem sometame, Mooley."

"You dang well know yuh—yuh sure have, Frenchy. Look!"

Muley points behind Frenchy, and there one end sticking out of the brush, is a wooden box, and the word "DYNAMITE" fairly yelps at us in big letters.

Frenchy turns to see what we're looking at, and the son-of-a-gun reaches for his six-shooter. He was years too late. Me and Chuck have him covered before he can touch his gun, and he stands there like a lamb, while Muley balances that box in front of him on the saddle-horn.

"Next time yuh better find out who owns things before yuh picks 'em up for yourself," advises Chuck. "Throw that gun over in the brush! That's the stuff. Now keep your mouth shut! Sabe?"

Frenchy didn't say a word, but we can see that he's a heap annoyed. We strings out down the trail, and when we're about two hundred yards from the camp, comes a splintering noise, and the report of a big rifle. Me and Chuck throws our broncs off the trail and gets down. We can hear Muley complaining about things, and we asks him why he feels so cross.

"Danged old pelican!" he wails. "That bullet cut the corner off our box!"

"You still got it, ain't yuh?" I asks.

"Uh-huh, I got her, Hen, but she almost

met her Waterloo on a rock. Reckon it loosened all the nails. Shall we go back and smoke up that old coot?"

"Next Christmas," replies Chuck. "That old coot has got a Sharps .45-70, and the Warners don't care for that style of death. He's crazy, Muley, and we'd put ourselves in his class if we went back."

We lifts that box back on Muley's saddle, and went on.

We hits the road, and makes good time for a mile or two, when we meets Mighty Jones. He stops and we exchanges pleasantries. We comments on the weather, the crops—which theer ain't none—and the general wear and tear on the human race. Muley switches the position of that box, and the next second we're covered by Mighty Jones. I starts to grin, but when I sees that Mighty is in earnest I irons my face out flat again.

"Hands up!" he snaps, and Muley lets that box slip. She hits the ground and rolls over. I glances at Mighty, and he's got the look on his face of a man who has seen all there is in life, but ain't ready to go blind.

"My ——!" he gasps, whirls his bronc around and gallops off down the road like a crazy man, holding on to his hat with one hand and fanning his bronc with the other.

We watches him fade away in the dust, and puts our hands down.

"Of all the locoed actions on earth that's the sharp end of the limit," proclaims Muley, sliding off his bronc.

That last shock was almost too much for that box, 'cause when Muley essays to lift her she sort 'a' opened on one end.

MULEY HOLDS his position for a moment, straightens up and gets on his bronc without taking his eyes off the box. He spurs his bronc, easy-like, until he's a few feet away from that box, and then he imitates Mighty Jones.

Me and Chuck puffs away on our cigarets and watches Muley depart.

"I'll likely get scared, too, but I'm taking a chance," states Chuck, and walks over to the box.

He sighs deep-like, and takes off his hat.

"Henry Peck, there must be a Supreme Being what watches over fools and cowpunchers. This box is full of eighty per cent. dynamite. Come and take a look."

"Your word is as good as gold, Chuck. That stuff must have a good disposition to stand all that grief. Let's go home before something happens to irritate it."

We finds Muley at the ford, but he ain't got much to say. He asks Chuck if he saw what was in that box, and Chuck said that he did.

"Wonderful!" exclaims Muley. "It stood rough handling but I never thought a face like yours could look upon eighty per cent. dynamite and not explode it. That's why I went away so rapid."

The old man is home when we gets there, and he announces that Telescope and Archibald Ames are still in jail.

"What does Archibald have to say about it?" I asks.

"That fat four-flusher!" yelps the old man. "He says that Telescope might 'a' done it. Of course this Ames feller don't fit the description, but he might at least—aw——"

"I'm going down to see Telescope," announces Muley.

"He lies down there in durance vile
Behind the bolts and locks,
With prison staring in his face
'Cause we can't find that box,
That held a little bunch of gold,
Which was labeled dynamite.
Will we let our pal wear striped clothes?"

"Not by a gol-danged sight!" I finishes, being somewhat of a poet myself.

Muley shakes my hand and invites me to join the Perverted Order of Paradise Poets, of which he's the only living member.

"Don't tell too much down there, Muley," advises Chuck. "If you runs off at the mouth I might get eased into jail, and that would cut down the number of detectives on the case. Sabe?"

"Fear not," says Muley. "I go but to bring cheer to the needy. I will be back anon."

About three hours later Doughgod Smith rides in, and we walks out to where him and the old man are greeting each other.

"If this keeps on, Whittaker, you're going to be short of men," states Doughgod.

"Huh!" grunts the old man. "One man don't make no difference this time of year. Three punchers is enough to set around and play cards, and eat up good grub."

"You only got two left now," says Doughgod. "Muley's in jail, too."

"Muley!" snorts the old man. "What's he in for?"

"Stealing dynamite from Mighty Jones."

Chuck had started to set down on his heels, but when Doughgod's information hits his ears he sprawls flat on his back and blinks at the sky. I starts to lean on a buckboard wheel that is ten feet away, and I ends up on my back with my feet over the tongue.

"Mighty spoke of some folks being accessory to the fact, too," states Doughgod, offhand-like.

"Stealing dynamite!" yelps the old man. "Where, when and what for?"

"I don't know. Mighty comes to town and acts like a man what has had delirious delight scared out of him. He anchors to Pelly's bar until he's gained normal again, and then he speaks knowingly of powder-thieves. Mighty's half-loco, and what ain't loco is absent-mindness, but just the same he has Muley arrested, and he hints of more arrests as soon as certain persons hit town. I seen Muley, and he said if I came this way to have Chuck and Hen come to see him."

"That's right," agrees the old man. "We'll all go down."

"Not me," says I. "I got rheumatic pains in my knees. Notice how I fell over that buckboard handle? I ain't myself today, and I simply couldn't stand it to ride."

"Neither could I," says Chuck. "I'm sore all over. Let's wait until tomorrow. Muley will be there just the same."

"We'll go in the buckboard," says the old man. "In a case like this I'd go if I had to walk."

"I'd admire to walk," says Chuck, but the old man goes after the team, and me and Chuck helps each other limp to the bunk-house.

"Shake hands with a murderer, Henry," says Chuck, offering his hand. "I've killed the old man and crippled Doughgod for life—in my mind. You and me will spend the evening and night in the Paradise jail, Henry Clay Peck."

"Can't yuh think of nothing cheerful to sing?" I asks. "If we're in jail we never will find that box. Think!"

"Think ——!" yelps Chuck, going to the door. "I'm going to enjoy the untainted air as long as I can."

I rustles out my war-sack and puts on clean clothes. It's liable to be some time before I gets a chance to change again. Chuck comes back after a while and sets down on the bunk, disconsolate-like, and plays "Just Before the Battle, Mother" on his mouth-organ. Pretty soon the old man yells to us.

We walks out, slow-like, and I climbs, painfully, into the seat with the old man. Chuck holds the team by the bits until we're all set. Then he lets loose and hops aboard as we goes past. We whirls out of the yard and hits the road on the run. Sudden-like that equipage does a high dive on one side, and yours truly stands on his head in a mesquite bush.

When I gets through making a cactus pincushion of my cranium, I riseth up and looks around.

Down the road about fifty yards sets the old man, gazing off down the road, and cussing at a piece of line he's still got in one hand. I hears a groan across the road, and Chuck's head sticks up out of the brush.

The old man gets up out of the road and painfully dusts off the seat of his pants. He plods up to us and looks us over.

"By cripes!" he snorts. "I ain't suspicious of nobody on earth. I'm a man among men, and I don't suspicion nobody, but if that wasn't foul play I'll eat the whole ranch. Now, I'll haul you hombres to town in a lumber wagon."

He plods on to the house, while I extracts cactus spines and cuss words from my carcass. Chuck limps over and rubs his hip.

"Light on a rock?" I asks, and he feels of his hip some more.

He reaches into his hip pocket, takes out an object and tosses it on the ground.

"Lit right on the darned thing!" he groans.

It's the nut off a front wheel of that buckboard. I kicks it off into the brush, and rolls a smoke.

"Well," says he, after a while, "you can give me credit for blocking the wheels of progress for a minute, can't yuh? I'll likely have to stand up all the way to town."

"We'll get plenty of time to rest," says I.

WE GOT to Paradise, but it wasn't no pleasure-ride, and the first person we see is Mighty Jones.

Mighty seems to have drowned his feelings, and he's spending his afternoon trying to hold up the hitch-rack. The old man goes in the saloon, but me and Chuck goes over to have a interview with our enemy. He nods at us like an owl.

"Tut-tut-tried to bub-blow me up," he stutters. "Tha's mean thing to-to-to do."

"Tell us all about it, old-timer," says Chuck, helping the old boy let loose of the rack, and leading him over to the sidewalk. "What's all this dynamite stuff I'm hearing about?"

Mighty gets very deliberate in his language:

"Eighty pershent. Tha's good powder. Sabe? Good powder but too ener-zhetic. Know what I mean? Mine's eighty per shent. Stage runs away and schtops at my place. I find box of shixty per shent. Sabe? Eighty too dangeroush to pack, so I exchanges. Sabe. Same price. Eighty per shent. too easy on trigger. Know what I mean? Lissen; shomebody mus' 'a' stole that eighty from the stage, and I can' fin' mine. Sabe?"

"Think!" yelps Chuck. "Think where yuh put it, Mighty!"

Mighty bobs his head and screws up his face:

"I know. Tha's the box Muley tried to assassinate me with."

"That was eighty per cent.!" yells Chuck. "Do yuh get that? It was eighty per cent.!"

"Zas so? Fool to drop eighty per shent. Awful careless."

"Where did you put that box you took off the stage?" I asks, pronouncing every word distinct and separate.

Mighty is so danged absent-minded that yuh got to make him remember.

"You took it out of the stage, and then what did you do with it?"

"Somebody must 'a' stole—whoa! I know! In the woodshed. I thought I put it in the barn. Ain' that the limit? Mus' go and turn poor old Muley loosh. Yes, sir. He never stole nothing."

"That's right," applauds Chuck. "Go right over and tell the sheriff to turn him loose."

"I got to shee Ricky firsht," states the old pelican, wise as a barn owl. "Mus' shee if Ricky wants to hold him for stealing that eighty per shent. Mighty Jones is law-abiding pershon. Know what I mean?"

We watches Mighty weave down the street, and Chuck grins all over his face—

"We'll find Telescope's and Muley's broncs, and we'll go up to Mighty Jones' woodshed and rescue that money."

We finds both broncs in Pelly's barn, so we saddles up and fares forth. We don't fare far until we meets Bill McFee. We stops and asks Bill if there's anything new.

"Nope," says he. "I reckon we got 'em in jail."

"So?" says Chuck. "Bill, how would you like to take a ride with us and bring back that seven thousand?"

Bill grins like it was a good joke:

"Uh-huh. I'd admire that. What's the joke?"

"Ain't no joke, Sheriff," says I. "You go with us and bring the gold back. Is that satisfactory?"

"I'd admire to know a little more."

"Not at all necessary," says Chuck. "Election is only three months away, and the credit ain't going to hurt yuh none, Bill."

"That's sensible," agrees Bill. "I'm with yuh."

Bill attempts to find out things, but we don't talk much, and it's dark when we climbs off at Mighty's place. We hikes right over to the woodshed. Bill lights a match and looks inside, drops the match and don't stop running for a hundred yards. Me and Chuck gallops with him for a ways, sort of sympathetic-like.

"Bobcats!" whistles Bill. "Shed's full of 'em!"

Yuh never can tell what kind of a pet a nut like Mighty is liable to have, so we ain't surprised a lot.

"I ain't afraid of no cat what ever lived," states Chuck. "I'm going to get that box in spite of anything."

We pilgrims up close again, with our guns ready. Chuck finds an old newspaper, which he lights, and we peeks around the corner of the door, and looks right into the shiny eyes of two big cats. Three guns goes off at the same time, and three men went away. There ain't a sound from the shed, so we sneaks back.

"That's good shooting," applauds Bill. "Two shots killed 'em both, 'cause I shot in the ground."

"Sure was," I agrees, "I did, too."

"Wonderful!" agrees Chuck. "They must 'a' jumped high, 'cause mine went through the roof."

Chuck tosses in that burning paper. Them cats are still there but don't move.

"Rugs!" snorts Chuck. "Mighty is sort of a taxidermist, and he put them eyes in himself. They sure look natural."

We found that box. Chuck makes a presentation speech to the minion of the law, who recites a few appropriate words in return. Bill takes the box on his saddlehorn, and we goes back to Paradise.

We gets McGuire and all the rest of Paradise's population to see the grand opening. We assembles in Pelly's saloon and Mike furnishes the hammer.

"Gents," states Bill, "this ain't a complete exoneration of Telescope and Ames, but I reckon it clears 'em a plenty. The law recovers said stolen property, but I'll let Mister Warner and Mister Peck tell the story. I can hunt lost things but I can't tell a interesting story like some folks."

"You better superintend this, McGuire," he continues. "It's a lot of wealth to look upon."

He tears the top boards off, and Paradise gazes a plenty.

Me and Chuck takes one gaze, and slips loose. We meets at the door, ambles around the corner and forks our broncs. I follers Chuck's lead, and about a mile from town we stops and looks back.

"Henry," says he, sad-like, "who do you suppose put them rocks in that box?"

"If I knew I'd be a murderer," says I, and then it strikes me funny. "Box of scab-rock guarded by two mounted bobcats! Haw! Haw! Haw! Mister McFee, we hereby puts in your care and custody one box, the value of same being problematical. You being a duly elected officer of the law, and, we having faith in your integrity and sense of duty, turneth over said box to be dealt with as yuh see fit," says I, quoting Chuck's woodshed speech.

"Value being problematical takes the curse off anyway, Hen," says he.

It's about midnight when we arrives at the Cross J. The old man is in the bunkhouse, and he looks us over, sad-like.

"What are you fellers trying to do?" he asks. "The sheriff sure is one sore person. Says he can prove that one or both of you was mixed up in that robbery."

"Aw ——!" snorts Chuck. "I thought it was the right box."

"It was. McGuire identified it. The question is this: you knowed where the box was—where are the contents? That's what Paradise wants to know."

"Paradise ain't got nothing on us, eh, Chuck?" says I. "If they wanted to know any worse than we do they'd all be sick."

Me and Chuck talks it all over and decides that the longer we're out of jail the more they'll have against us when we do get in, so we decide to give ourself up before we're liable to capital punishment.

THE next morning we rides away to be locked up in self-defense. Just outside of Paradise we overtakes an Injun. He's jogging along on a glass-eyed pinto, and he grins when he sees Chuck. Chuck stands in with all the aborigines.

"Hello, Tenas Charley," grins the buck.

"Hello, Hiawatha," grins Chuck. "Where you go so early?"

"You sabe Doc Milliken?"

"You bet. Why you wantum?"

"Givum letter. Me got letter. White man hurtum leg. No walk. Me go to Doc Milliken. Sabe?"

He fusses around in his blanket and produces a piece of paper. Chuck takes the paper and reads the few words. He hands me the letter and grins. It reads like this:

> Hurt my leg. Follow the Injun to me.

There ain't no name signed.

"Heap scared," informs the Injun. "Hurtum leg on tree."

"Where you camp?" asks Chuck, and we gets informed that it's on Little Beaver Crick. Chuck gives him back the letter, and swings around. "So long, Setting Bull," says he, and the Injun grins and bobs off down the road.

"Now where?" I asks, and Chuck grins.

"Slippery Silverton!" he whoops. "If it was anybody around here they'd 'a' signed their name. He's hived up with that Injun, and we're going to land him, Henry. Maybe he's got the gold, too."

It didn't take us long to find that camp. We advances on foot. There's a white man setting on the sunny side of that teepee, and he's in blissful ignorance until me and Chuck lands on his shoulders like two playful bears. He gets energetic, but Chuck taps him on the head with his gun, and we hog-ties him proper. When he opens his eyes Chuck grins at him an' says—

"Hello, Slippery."

He don't say a word.

"Don't talk," advises Chuck. "Yuh might wear out your teeth."

The feller looks at us, foolish-like, so we hoists him up on Chuck's bronc, and Chuck rides behind him. Once he opened his mouth and spoke one line:

"You fellers are an hour late."

That's all he said. I reckon Chuck hit him pretty hard.

We pilgrims right into Paradise, and up to Pelly's saloon. There ain't a soul in sight, but we observes signs of life down where we holds our court. We takes our captive down there, cuts the ropes off his legs and takes him inside.

The place is crowded and Telescope is on the stand. We gets in just in time to hear the judge ask Telescope if he can think of any earthly reason why he shouldn't be held for the next term of court.

"A lot of reason, Judge!" yells Chuck, pushing our prisoner up to the front. "Here's the main reason. Gents, I makes yuh used to Slippery Silverton!"

"Silverton ——!" I hears McGuire yelp. "That's the owner of the Golden Cross mine, Mister Warde." And then he horns his way over to our prisoner and snorts—

"What does this all mean?"

"I don't know," says the feller. "I—— I must 'a' got hurt. Unless I'm mistaken I came part-way from the mine with Joe Allerton. We had that gold shipment. We sent out two decoy boxes on account of so many robberies. We rode across the hills. Joe figured on just making that train. He went to Helena. I wanted a pair of moccasins, and Joe left me at that Indian teepee. The owner wasn't there, so I waited. That's all, I guess. Somebody jumped on to me and—here I am."

"The—the gold didn't come down yesterday?" gasps McGuire, and Warde shakes his head, painful-like. "No. Just a box of rocks."

Just then in comes Doc Milliken.

"Say!" he yells. "Will one of you strong men come and help me set a man's leg? Mighty Jones cut a tree the wrong way and it lit on him. Lucky he was found by an Injun, who came for help. He was able to send a note but fainted before he could sign his name. All I want is somebody to hold him down. He's so absent-minded that he's liable to run away. He says to tell Ricky Henderson that his box of dynamite is either in the hay-loft or under his cabin floor. He can't remember which."

Art Miller is standing close to Chuck, and Chuck grabs him by the arm and whispers—

"What does a new wheel for your stage cost, Art?"

"About eight dollars, Chuck—why?"

"Here's ten. Don't ask me."

While there is plenty of talk me and Chuck backs out and rides out of town. We're in the bunk-house when Telescope and Muley and the old man comes home. Telescope and Muley comes in and looks us over, solemn-like. Pretty soon Muley climbs up on the bunk and recites, with appropriate gestures and feeling:

"Let me sing yuh a song of four danged fools,
  Four punchers whose brains are nix,
Who done some things they ought not to do,
  And got in a —— of a fix.
One was stuck on himself and wanted to be
  Admired at ten cents a throw.
Another wore stilts so he'd look like a man,
  When he went out after the dough.
Three of the fools fooled with dynamite,
  One beat up an innocent man.
The price of a wheel was all that it cost.
  You may beat it—I don't think yuh can."

"Beautiful," says I. "You've got a soul, Muley. There's still that box of dynamite of Mighty's to account for."

"He picked it up on his way home," says Muley. "That's settled."

"Did Archibald Ames get his local color?" I asks, and Telescope shakes his head. "Archibald Ames didn't wait for nothing. He even hired somebody to drive him to Silver Bend. I asked him what he wanted me to do, and he told me to go to a place where they don't cut holes in the ice."

"You'll miss them meals in bed," sympathizes Chuck, wiggling his ears, and ducks outdoors just in time.

A boot-jack splintered on the door behind him.

"Well, it ended all right anyway," grunts Muley. "How'd yuh say yuh hurt that leg, Telescope?"

Telescope peeks out of the door, and then limps back to me and Muley.

"I didn't go to Bowers' that first day the stage was robbed," he whispers. "Don't breathe it to a soul. I wouldn't have Chuck hear it for a million."

We holds up our right hands.

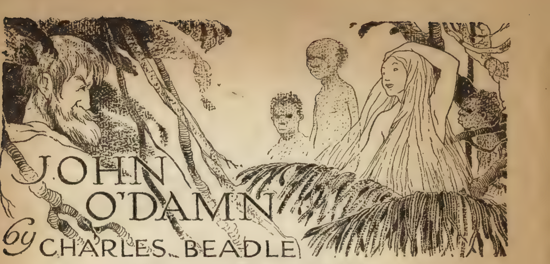
"Well," says he, "that cottonwood snag they made me climb didn't have no bark on it, and when I started down I slid too fast. Sabe?"

"Chuck was right!" I snorts. "He sure told the truth that time."

Telescope hops to his feet and grabs me by the arms.

"What do yuh mean, Hen? What did Chuck say?"

"He said it sure was slippery," says I.



# JOHN O'DAMN

by CHARLES BEADLE

*Author of "The Christman" and "The Idol of 'It'."*

IN THE district of the Upper Ituri where the ground begins to rise in rhythmic waves as if summoning courage for the mighty heave of the Mountains of the Moon, are patches of grass land, brown freckles on the green face of the forest whose lips are the mouth of the sun-kissed Congo.

In one of these glades at the time of the stirring of life from the noon siesta, the stagnant air was rippled as slightly as a leaf impinging on the placid waters of a lake by the breathing of a white man who sprawled at the foot of a great tree, his bare head glowing like a pumpkin against the fungoid bark. A scarlet-and-emerald lizard darted from the grass, paused by the butt of a rifle propped against the trunk, and flashed away at the quirk of the outstretched arm. A water-buck appeared like a warm shadow twenty paces distant, snuffed delicately and vanished. The yellow pall of heat beyond the blue shadows shimmered.

As the dank silence was scratched by the shriek of a parrot, rose from the grass two faint sounds resembling the softest gurgles from a water-bottle.

The white man slept on, one gaitered leg thrown across the other. Within three feet of them the stems of the rank grass were parted slowly, revealing the glimmer of eyes. Again came the liquid noises. The eyes developed into the frame of a small brown face, woolly-headed, having a squat nose which seemed to snuff the air. Stealthily followed as small a body, wrinkled and bony, holding in a claw-like hand a tiny bow and arrow. Two more raptorial beings glided in his wake.

As the sleeper stirred and emitted a choked sigh, the three were frozen into immobility. But when the steady breathing recommenced the patient creep began again, suspiciously; continued until the leader peered inquisitively into the pallid face half-hidden by the red beard and hair.

The great frame twitched and the eyes opened. Then as swiftly as the dart of the lizard the rifle disappeared into the long grass. Something—perhaps the blueness of the eyes—stayed the fingers on the bowstrings as the white man heaved on to his elbow and stared at the two bronze figures poised to shoot or to flee.

"Say," he remarked quickly but amiably, "I am pleased to see you!"

The smile or the voice distracted the savages. One hopped a pace; but the leader held his ground.

"I suppose," continued the white man smiling, "that if I take my eyes off you, you'll consider it necessary to stick me with one of those ridiculous arrows? And I notice that my rifle's gone. Presumably there are others of you. Possibly many; behind me probably."

He ceased to speak. The bowstring of the younger savage tautened.

"Very good, my son," pursued the white man hastily, "as my melodious accents seem to please you I will continue—although I fail to see anything particularly humorous in the situation." He smiled largely. *"Habari gani? Kusema Kiswahili?*

Nothing doing, eh? Now I suppose that if I attempt to pantomime my most elemental need you'll surely misconstrue my intentions? Presumably the primitive life conduces to as cynical a view of other people's motives as does civilization? Is that so?"

The steady smile deepened, but the eyes did not quaver.

"However, we'd better introduce ourselves. I'm Professor John P. O'Gorman of the American Museum of Natural History, very much—obviously—at your service! And you, I presume, are the original pigmy, *n'est ce pas?* Sir! I am most delighted to have made your acquaintance—having traveled some five thousand miles for that express purpose. Certainly you are most interesting. I wonder whether you would mind standing up? No? Ah well, from this elevation I should hazard a guess that you are not more than three-feet-six—at most—and I'm six-three!

"Quite a Gulliver, eh? You haven't read Swift? Evidently your educational system is as defective as the American! Ah, you don't appreciate the joke? Well, no matter! But by the way this smile is getting rather worn and my shoulder's devilish stiff. Now I wonder——"

Cautiously he began to move his arm. Instantly came a water-bottle cluck and the fingers tautened.

"Dear me," observed Professor O'Gorman, "this is the longest lecture I've ever given—and such attentive students I've surely never had! But what in hell am I to do? Yes, yes, I will resume! Now—er—I wonder whether it would interest you to know that your skulls appear to be sub-brachycephalic? More interesting than you appear to suspect. Unfortunately I haven't got my instruments with me. However—I wish you wouldn't fiddle with that bowstring! It gets on my nerves.

"Yet I rather doubt whether the fire-hardened point of that ridiculous arrow would penetrate this cloth. Very interesting point. No, I didn't intend to pun. I'm not feeling like that just now. I've got that disagreeable sensation popularly—and most descriptively—known as pins and needles in my elbow—and my shoulder aches abominably. Now I wonder what gesture would convoy William J. Bryan to your bright, young intellects?"

He raised his right hand toward his mouth. *Phtt!* An arrow quivered in his coat above his heart. He remained motionless, never relaxing the intent gaze nor the fixed smile.

"That, gentlemen," he said in a quiet voice, "is distinctly an overt act!"

Very slowly he moved the arrested hand, plucked out the arrow and snapped it between two fingers. The two heads quirked in a bird-like movement as he cast the pieces on the ground. Professor O'Gorman saw indecision. In one action he sat up, bunching his knees. The savages hopped backward; and stopped to watch as he tore open his shirt, exposing a bare white chest. He grinned widely. Again came the rapid clucks.

"You forget that I always carry my notebook in that pocket—although I'll admit that your —— arrow does penetrate!" said the professor and held out his hand.

They made no attempt to shake, but evidently understood the amicable significance of the gesture.

"Good! Now we'll try again!"

He motioned to his mouth, masticating imaginary food. They put up their bows and timidly, suspiciously, clucked at him.

"No savee!—— the Tower of Babel!"

They chattered and pointed across the glade and at their mouths.

"Good. I get you. Very hospitable!"

AS HE rose the two little men hopped to one side nervously and stared up at the giant as if paralyzed by the realization of his height.

"I hope you don't live far away," remarked the professor, "as I'm —— tired. And I wonder whether you'll think me impolite if I ask what you've done with my rifle? Ah, you devil!" as he caught a glimmer of eyes in the long grass and the blue gleam of the barrel.

The pigmy leader who, erect, looked like a hairless ape, clucked violently, pointing.

"All right, my son, lead on!"

The professor nodded vigorously; but the savage gabbled and hopped behind him. The professor hesitated; then strode on in the direction indicated.

"—— it!" he grumbled, as the pigmies trotted behind him across the glade like children herding a red ox, "this is the first time I've ever been driven!"

But in the forest the professor was not so fresh; progress was laborious. Once he stopped and thought that he had lost his escort—until a soft cluck drew his eyes to a brown face and a pipe-stem of an arm in the riot of greens, pointing the way.

"Oh, damn!" gasped the professor as he slid into green slime to his knees, "this stinks like $H_2SO_4$!"

The professor plunged on, panting and sweating, scrambling from gnarled root to root across acres of bog, wading through swamp and crashing through undergrowth. The relaxation from the strain of grinning and talking for his life had cooled the enthusiasm evoked by the meeting with any being who merited the description—however remote—of *genus homo* after thirty-six hours in a hot dank prison whose walls were green and clinging. He began to realize the gravity of his plight; and his temper began to fray. He swore feebly but venomously.

At last when the irritation of fatigue appeared intolerable, he suddenly became conscious of twenty pairs of eyes regarding him from the tangled screen of creepers. He stopped. Skinny arms and legs rustled the leaves. They swarmed down and clustered 'round him, a quaint band of dusky beings scarce up to his middle.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen!" said the professor, recovering his *sang-froid* with an effort.

The sound of his voice evoked a gust of dental chatter like a puff of wind among Autumn leaves. A wizened being whom with difficulty he recognized as the leader of his captors, so much alike were they, strutted in front of him pointing ahead. The professor obeyed, expecting to come upon a clearing or opening in the forest in which the village would be located. But twenty paces away he was halted abruptly by the sight of a strange being, head and shoulders above the little people, whose body gleamed pallidly in the half light of the forest, a being showered to the hips in amber hair.

"Pithecanthropus!" murmured the professor eagerly. "Impossible—but——"

A slender arm was upraised as she clutched a tendril; one leg was poised for flight, the foot upon a branch with a prehensile grip. She peered in Eve-like curiosity at the red-bearded giant. The evidence of his senses bewildered the professor—yet the presence of a lady brought reaction—he took off his helmet.

Amid a gale of clucks the girl appeared to glide upward, disappearing in the wall of green. Amazedly he stared at the circle of little men, each with a bow strung menacingly. Quickened by the need of conciliatory action he held out his hand. The gesture was successful. The wizened elder loosened his bowstring and shot upward into the tree, clucking violently.

"Now what the devil can this amazing person be?" grumbled the professor as footsore, black with sweat and slime he sank on to a gnarled root.

For a few moments there sounded the rustle of leaves and a faint purling as of a brook over stones. Then came a scuttling among the little men peeking at him as from the wall of green emerged the girl advancing upon a fallen log like an acrobat, her hair spread out like an amber peacock tail, each tress borne by one of the little people who strutted in a crescent behind her.

Fearful of offending again, the professor sat with the helmet upon his knee. At five paces from him the cortège halted. Her flesh, he saw, had a strange waxiness like green ivory; the abundant hair was of a very fine texture; the small oval face with wild blue eyes was poised upon a well-proportioned body—seeming like a tower of chalcedony above the dark bronze escort.

While his mind fought with a flail of questions he rose slowly and said very gently—

"Good evening, madame!"

She continued to stare silently, her small lips parted like an astonished child.

"Er—you speak English?"

She did not blink.

"H'm. *Vous êtes Francaise? Non?* Well—*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?* H'm. *Habla Español?* No? Nothing doing, eh?"

Pointing at him she uttered several labial syllables. A chill of horror affected the professor as he realized that she could speak no language save this—simian lingo. But how on earth had she gotten here? These people must have stolen her. She was evidently Aryan—and brought up by these monkeys. Away from all civilized environment! Terrible! But . . . The professor's scientific mind and training overcame sentiment. He ejaculated—

"Really the most interesting case I've ever heard of!"

She smiled—a white smile, not a grin,

exposing small, white teeth—and darting forward, the escort attached seeming to jerk forward like puppets on a wire, ludicrously, she pulled the professor's beard.

"Amazing!" ejaculated the professor, acutely interested.

He smiled at her. She laughed silently like a vastly tickled child.

She clapped her hands and chattered.

"—— it, I wish you would not do that!" exclaimed the professor. "It offends—one's sense of what a lady should do!"

Again she laughed soundlessly and paused expectantly. The professor stared. She drummed her small feet impatiently, chattered, and suddenly pulled his beard again.

"Dear me," remarked the professor, "what is it that you wish me to do? At any rate," smiling, "you seem determined to get my goat!"

As the professor guffawed she clapped her hands delightedly and began to dance.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" roared the professor, hands on knees, tickled by the conclusion that she connected the pulling of his beard with the control of his laughter; a guffaw which startled her into a peal of clear laughter.

"He! He! He!" she squealed, capering madly in front of him, apparently intoxicated by her own vocal expression while her escort rustled about by her jerking tresses, solemnly regarded this strange rite.

The reaction from this paroxysm left him weak. He sank back on to the root. The sudden solemnity sobered the girl. She gaped as he motioned to his mouth; and turning swiftly, wrenching her hair from her absurd courtiers, beckoned and led him to a fire smoldering at the foot of a great tree. As he stood gazing 'round for their village or camp she thrust a blackened calabash pot into his hands. After pecking at the glutinous mess with a forefinger he recognized the faint sweety taste as wild cassava which he bolted, greedily regarded by the little people with as absorbing an interest as a bunch of New Yorkers watching the excavation of a drain-pipe.

The food produced an intense desire to sleep. But the girl who had squatted to regard him fascinatedly, rose eagerly.

"Oh, damn!" exclaimed the professor irritably as she plucked his beard, smiling with childish anticipation. "Nothing doing! Savee? I want to sleep! Sleep!"

But having gotten the correct reaction from the beard-baiting she began to clap delightedly. He gestured violently and posed his head upon his hand. The girl regarded him inquisitively as if demanding whether this were a new game. Then comprehending, began to swarm up a tree. The professor was nonplussed; but as he stared upward he observed what appeared to be giant nests amid the branches.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned. "Now I've got to be a bird!"

With the aid of her prehensile toes she led the band with simian ease; but for the professor with his bulk and heavy boots the way was as hard as the path of righteousness. Exhausted and panting, he crawled into a shelter formed of branches interlaced across horizontal boughs, and sprawling in a corner sank instantly to sleep amid a crowd of chattering women and children.

From a ridiculous dream in which he was in a hospital being tickled by nurses he became semiconscious. A real poke in the ribs elicited an "*Ow!*" and brought him wide awake to find that he was packed like a codfish in a tin of sardines between moist limbs and bodies.

A vivid realization of his environment—and the stench—impelled him to dash out of the hut, only quelled by the recollection that he could not fly. Now and again above the rhythmic breathing and the drip of the forest which sounded like eternal weeping came the dismal hoot of an owl. The professor groaned, swallowed a mouthful of fetid acrid heat, and lapsed into the slumber of the exhausted.

## II

THE strain of thirty-six hours' wandering in the jungle, although it had not killed scientific interest in his amazing discovery, had clouded the professor's mind until the elemental needs of food and sleep had been satisfied.

But when he awoke to find himself alone in the green light of dawn he realized fully the gravity of his plight. These little people were undoubtedly the wild pigmy of the forest, seldom seen or even glimpsed by whites or negroes, a primitive shy folk who even in bartering with their comparatively tame brethren of the forest fringe, would only consent to leave skins at a tree in the darkness and return the following night to collect the sweet potatoes, of copper wire, or other produce left for them. They were nomads; neither cultivating nor fighting; living mostly on edible roots and game in the deepest recesses of the Congo forests.

The professor's camp was two hundred miles from the nearest Belgian outpost; and he was—he had no idea how far from his camp. What chance had he of being rescued? As he stared despondently at the glow of sunrise leaf-patterned on the forest roof he could hear them chattering. He listened, mechanically noting four distinct clicks—a labial, kissing sound; dental, as a monkey chatters; palatal, as a carter encourages his horse; and a lingual, a gurgling *klop-klop* of a water-bottle; so he concluded that their language consisted of combinations of these four clicks.

"Interesting," he mused; but how the devil was he to communicate with them, to ask aid, to offer a reward? He knew a little Kiswahili, the *lingua franca* of middle Africa; but they, no word. As he jotted down notes he became aware of a looseness in the waist. His belt had gone! Hence the ridiculous dream of nurses tickling! The devils had the cartridges as well as the rifle! However, there was nothing to be done but to make the best of the situation by studying the conditions. What a splendid monograph he would be able to write—if ever he got free!

As he continued to scribble the girl swung from a bough into the communal nest. Squatting on her haunches she smiled at him. He smiled. She chattered, and stretching out her hand, pulled at his beard.

"Good morning then," said he, "as evidently that's what you want, eh?"

She laughed, a loud peal of delight.

"Imitative," continued the professor. "Probably you've never laughed aloud in your life until you heard me. Savages never do. However, you seem to enjoy it thoroughly. Satisfying a repressed instinct. She gesticulated delightedly. Splendid! Now for the first thing suppose we begin a lesson? Your imitative faculty should help you some. Food! Food! Food!" he repeated, pointing to his open mouth. "Get that?"

But she chattered and pointed below.

"No; not yet. I want you to say it, my dear. Listen—foo-d! Foo-d!"

As he leaned toward her mouthing the word, she goggled and perked her head on one side like an inquisitive sparrow. After he had performed about twenty times she pursed her lips.

"Fool!" she said, blowing it at him.

"Not bad!" said the professor. "Now again—foo-ddd!"

But she persisted in counting it as a new game, blowing at him and giggling. The professor considered and pointed to his mouth and below. Immediately she swung out of the nest with the effortless ease of a monkey. He clambered after her, watched by a dozen faces. Below were the ashes of a fire. The girl proffered him a lot of the cold or tepid cassava.

"Oh, damn!" ejaculated the professor with an image of breakfast food before him.

The girl laughed delightedly.

"H'm," said he, sticking a finger in the mess. "—— of a joke, isn't it?"

While he ate—not much—he regarded the crowd of men and women. They found him a most absorbing object. The women wore no ornaments of any kind, not even the usual tribal cicatrices; the woolly hair was unkempt. On even the stoutest of them the ribs showed plainly in contrast to the white girl who although lean was well fleshed.

Evidently, mused the professor, hereditary powers of digestion and resistance—or perhaps she gets the pickings.

Overcome by a longing to know the exact conformation of the skull, he advanced to a young pigmy, judging from her breast. With a squeak she fled. Instantly the white girl chattered angrily, provoking much clucking among the tribe which was finished by the girl seizing the child and dragging her up to the professor.

She protested volubly. He hesitated, fearing to rouse their ire, but concluding that the girl had the power of a chief and guessing at their conception of his intentions, decided that it would be best to disabuse their minds. So while the girl held the terrified child he ran expert fingers over the skull, estimating shrewdly the dimensions and formation.

Then just to show that there was no favoritism he turned his attention to the white girl. She stood as still as a rock as his fingers fumbled beneath her hair. Gravely extracting his memo-book he made notes. The little folk watched the magic ritual in complete silence.

"Thanks very much," he said, bowing solemnly.

The girl laughed, seemingly eager for the slighest excuse to exercise her newly found vocal accomplishments, and he noticed that save for the head man, who had grinned, no facial contortion resembling mirth ever disturbed the pigmies' features—tending to the conclusion that a sense of humor only developed in ratio to the intellectual development.

The compliance of the lady suggested that he might be able to enlist her aid in recovering his rifle and cartridges. He patted her arm to emphasize approval, and pointed to his waist and peered around. The girl watched him attentively, chattered and began to make a hoarse screaming noise.

Puzzled the professor again pantomimed the missing belt, which elicited once more the bellowing as the girl pointed at him and to the forest. The noise suggested a bad imitation of a cow lowing.

"But a cow—here!" murmured the professor.

She laughed delightedly, gestured at the stolid folk still gazing and then walked away beckoning. Immediately the professor moved, the whole tribe followed him. The sight of one little man bearing a smoldering stick and of women loaded with babes and calabashes gave him an idea. They were on the march!

WHERE were they going? Probably deeper into the forest, making escape more improbable than ever. As the professor halted the tribe stopped in his wake. The wizened little captor materialized, pointing a pipe-stem arm. Two yards away the girl, waist deep in undergrowth, beckoned. The sun was merely an incandescent glow through the roof of the forest. The professor could not take his bearings and had he been able to see he was not sure in what direction he had wandered from the camp. Perforce he must obey.

As he plunged on the tribe melted away except for the girl leading him. But they were there; now and again he could catch a glimpse of a tiny brown leg or arm, a head, and hear the *click-click* of a conversation in the dense green.

To the professor the struggle was almost insupportable; but the little folk slid through the jungle as snakes glide through grass. Occasionally the professor was compelled to rest, panting and exhausted. Sometimes the harsh screams of a flock of parrots broke the eternal dripping of the forest and the perpetual rustle of the myriad life.

And they stuck to the "cursed" forest; forest all the time. Once when an open glade was sighted through the cavernous gloom the professor jibbed and pointed earnestly to the blinding spread of sunlight. But the girl chattered and beckoned straight ahead; and a dozen thin arms protruded through the green walls. Always was he conscious of those eyes watching, ever driving him.

Sometimes the girl would squat on the limb of a tree and watch him patiently. When the exasperated professor cursed aloud she would laugh delightedly—and the professor swore anew! Twice when he failed to curse she approached and pulled his beard and "he! he'd!" with delight at the torrent of oaths with which the professor reacted.

As they were traversing a piece of comparatively dry going she suddenly leaped a clear six feet to the right. He stopped. The girl chattered at him excitedly. At first the professor could see nothing; then a mass of brilliant green leaves and dark shadows moved. He saw the coils of a snake. The professor moved quickly.

The farther he went the more anxious grew the professor. They might be off on a week's march for all he knew. He couldn't do it; no white man could.

At last at 10:25 by his repeater the professor mutinied. He sank down on a root and refused to budge. He made signs of sleep. The whole tribe, only fragments of it visible, discussed the situation energetically. But the professor didn't care. He slept.

When he awakened from a short doze he found the girl squatting a few feet from him as motionless as a sphinx. No sign of the little folk could he see; but he had learned enough to know that they were not far off. Immediately she saw that he was awake she approached and pulled his beard.

The professor had thought this was funny at first, but now he was tired and irritable. He scowled and spoke no word. She seemed surprised, and she made a move to repeat the action; but the professor snarled fiercely, showing his teeth like a red-muzzled Irish terrier. She appeared to understand the menace and desisted. Then after a pause she pointed to her head. The professor stared. She reached and taking his hand put it in her hair. For a moment he left it there, puzzled to know what she could mean. He laughed. She wanted to have her bumps read again. The tickling sensation was pleasing.

He scratched her head. She whined. As soon as he ceased she chattered at him, but he shook his head. Smiling she plucked his beard. This time the professor felt better-tempered.

"All right, my dear," said he, "you can get the reaction this time as it's up to me to make you my friend if ever I'm to get out of this—and if you like I'll take you too. Would you like to?"

She laughed in delight and danced about.

"You're a base flatterer, you know!" he continued humoring her. "I never guessed that I had such a charming voice before. As a matter of fact, it's the music of your own kind that pleases you. I wonder who the devil your people were? How old are you? Not more than fifteen I should think by your development—allowing for the tropics."

She glided close to him and put down her head.

"Well, I'm ——!" said he. "I know dogs love to have their ears scratched, but never a human! D'you know you'd be rather a beauty if you had a wash and got dolled up a bit. What I can't get is how on earth you've gotten your color? You certainly have the most extraordinary pigmentation. Say now, wouldn't you like better to come with me and get the benefits of civilization? Eh? If I can get out of this I guess I can get you with me, and it isn't the thing to let a white stay with these friends of yours. What do you think?"

He stopped scratching and held her face up.

"What do you think?"

She smiled delightedly and put her head down to be scratched again.

"No, no! Look here!"

He held up her head and pointed to himself, to her and the vague distance. She stared, puzzled for a moment; and then arose, evidently prepared to resume the journey.

"No, no!" exclaimed the professor vigorously. "You don't get me. Come here!" he beckoned.

Obediently she came and sat beside him.

"That's it. Now let's try another lesson. Watch me! Foo-dd!"

"F-oool!" she blew at him ready for the game again.

"Oh, damn!" said the professor.

"Oh, damn!" she echoed back at him.

The professor nearly fell off the root. He stared. She seemed impressed with the effect.

"Oh, damn!" she repeated distinctly.

With an effort he repressed the impulse to laugh, aware that for some subconscious reason she had gotten the impulse to mimic.

"Foodd!" he said solemnly.

She repeated the word clearly—

"Foodd!"

"Good!" he ejaculated in triumph.

"Goodd!" she mimicked.

"Fine," said the professor. "Now—" tapping his chest—"John!"

" 'Onn!"

"No good. Listen—Jo-hn!"

" 'Onn!" she repeated.

"Oh, damn!" swore the professor disappointedly. "*Jo-hn.*"

"John—oh, damn!" exclaimed she.

"Oh! Splendid!" shouted the professor.

"John, oh, damn!" she repeated joyfully.

Peal after peal of laughter startled the little folk and fifty pairs of eyes watched from the clouds of green this strange magic of the white folk.

### III

THAT afternoon the professor decided that the better plan was to delay their march as much as possible. Accordingly he resolutely refused to move. They chattered and clucked, but to no purpose; the professor had mutinied. For some reason that he could not fathom they finally elected to camp on the ground, swiftly making shelters of boughs and grass.

Desperately he kept on with the lessons in English. Whether from a natural or hereditary aptitude she picked up words with surprising celerity. Many she got muddled; misconnecting the sounds with the objects. Try as he would he could not dissociate the name John with "Oh damn" so that she continued to touch him on the chest with much delight saying, "John O Damn," followed by a peal of laughter.

All through the heat of the day grimly the professor played the wonderful new game. Besides the interest in teaching her and getting a little inside this strange anomaly of a mind, there lay the principal chance of escape.

One morning in the midst of a lesson she put her hands on his chest and began to pick at the fastening of his shirt. The professor almost blushed! He held her hand, wondering what on earth she was after. She chattered at him expostulatingly, saying:

"Good! Good! John oh damn!"

Then she pointed to her own breast, to his chest and at the little people.

For a while he could not imagine what she could mean. Finally out of curiosity he unbuttoned the shirt and dropped his hands to see what she would do. With a quaint gesture like a monkey opening a bag of nuts she pulled the shirt apart. The exposure of his bare chest startled a litter of clicks. A finger touching his flesh and her own acquainted him that she was pleased to observe that they were both of approximately the same color.

By the end of a week she had gotten the sense of fully a score of words into her head; and with such a vocabulary much may be done. They were all words of simple and concrete objects; verbs were limited to "go," "come," "stop," "sleep." Each attempt to invite her to escape with him was doubtful; for the most he could attain was to suggest more than one white man, the vague distance, and that she would go with him. She had assented eagerly laughing, but whether she had understood or not he could not determine, only could he await an opportunity.

Evidently the savages had thoroughly established the identity of race or godhood, whichever it was, between the two, for now a separate shelter was erected for each of them and his primitive behests were obeyed without question except—the return of his rifle and cartridges. For even gods were not to be trusted in their estimation.

On one day the tribe did not make any attempt to persuade him to march and were very excited. The girl in explanation made the cow-like noise again, which was explained later by the bellowing of an elephant.

"Come! Come!" said the professor.

"Come!" echoed the girl.

She led him through the jungle to a swamp where an elephant, hamstrung by the little people, lay wallowing and trumpeting in death agony with half a dozen tiny arrows in the soft of the joints.

The professor demanded his rifle. But the girl replied that the beast would "sleep." When the elephant did "sleep" the little folk were soon crawling over and in the vast carcass like ants over a chunk of meat. They camped immediately and forthwith gorged themselves to repletion—to sleep, to wake, to eat again. The professor was in despair; yet he was weak and thin and the meat food was strengthening. He noticed that the girl ate moderately—instinctively apparently.

On the fourth day, amid much chatter, they began to move. Although the greater part of the carcass remained they made no attempt to carry any away with them, perhaps knowing no method, as did more civilized tribes, of preserving meat; but they did remove the tusks. This made the professor think hard. He decided that hope of escape lay in the fact that as ivory is of value all over Africa that even these peoples would desire to realize something upon it and would consequently approach nearer to a more civilized tribe to barter for wire or implements.

In the dank cavern of the jungle all ways were the same to the professor, so that he could not surmise whether they had changed their direction or not. However, in desperate hope he no longer tried to delay progress, but marched as long and as hard as he could. On the third day they came to an open glade about a mile across and halted. A terrific discussion broke out. Evidently like apes they feared to leave the trees, for they waited on the fringe until scouts had returned from the long grass and the tops of high trees.

Then came another commotion. The girl refused to enter the open, chattered, violently gestured. The professor was puzzled at her fear until she pointed to the blazing sun and at her body.

"Ot!" she said persistently. "Ot! Ot!" using her English vocabulary.

Then the professor understood why she had retained her color, acquiring the greeny pallor in the stewing atmosphere of the jungle. But this refusal to leave the shelter might mean a serious bar to their escape, he reflected.

"Good—good!" said he, patting her. And taking off his coat he put it upon her. She made no resistance. By her smiles and "oh, damns" she seemed to consider it a great joke and without further ado capered on ahead into the sunshine, laughing.

Evidently she decided that the coat was "good medicine," for on entering the forest on the other side she made no attempt to return it. The professor acquiesced, saying, "Good! good!" and she laughed, crying, "Oh, damn! John oh damn!" delightedly.

But the glimpse of the sun had informed the professor that they were going north—which meant toward the Boma Masindi trail from Uganda.

THAT evening there was much excitement in the tribe which the professor mistakenly translated as being near to an alien people. They camped high in a tree, which indicated that some danger was apprehended. For the first time since he had lost it the professor saw his rifle—being dragged into a nest on an opposite bough. He drew the girl's attention, energetically making the most of their vocabulary. To his surprise she assented, saying—

"Come—John oh damn!"

She chattered across the tree which resulted in two pigmies bringing the rifle.

Eagerly he opened the breech—to find that somehow they had contrived to work the ejector, for the cartridge had gone; and upon examination he discovered the barrel to be full of slime. He managed to clear it after a fashion, but the rifling was rusted from breech to muzzle. However, the professor attempted to conjure some cartridges. Cursing, the professor went to bed.

At the hour of the monkey he was awakened by the girl. He sat up abruptly at her "no good—oh damns." The moon was full and high. Around in the tree the little folk were clicking away as softly as a Spring shower upon a roof. Then his ear caught a peculiar sound—a distinct drumming as of native tom-toms.

A village must be near, he thought joyfully. But the girl kept whispering:

"No good, oh damn! No good, oh damn!"

She pushed a cartridge into his hand as she tugged at his shirt sleeve. He crawled to the edge of the nest platform noticing that her eyes registered extreme terror as she pointed downward.

A glimpse in a patch of spattered moonlight made him catch his breath—a gorilla half-erect was pounding its hands on the enormous hairy chest.

As the brute vanished into the blue shadows another appeared moving sideways like a gigantic crab—and another.

Now the professor comprehended why they had restored the rifle. Evidently not understanding how to use it they desired him to defend them. But one cartridge! He held up the cartridge, saying, "No good—five!" and lifted both hands, for as he had learned the little folk could only count to four, five: two hands upraised conveyed plurality generally.

The girl brought him two more.

"Oh, damn!" he whispered.

"Oh, damn!" she murmured encouragingly.

Hastily he attempted to ram home a cartridge; but try as he would to manipulate the ejector the cartridge would not enter the rusted breech. He scraped at it in the gloom with a penknife. The cartridge jammed half-way and would neither go in nor come out. He peered below again.

The gorillas were still around the tree. They were cornered. There was nothing to do but wait and trust that the brutes would not be moved to attack.

As the girl lay beside him along the great bough she pointed down and at herself, whispering:

"Me! Me!"

The professor pondered and imagined that she meant that these brutes were her parents.

"No good," he murmured, "your biology's all wrong, my dear!"

"Yes, yes," she insisted, pointing at the great apes below, at the pigmies and then at her breasts, muttering persistently: "Me! Me!"

The professor grasped the fact that she knew that she had been stolen from her people by gorillas as the orang-outang steal native children in Borneo; and probably, he surmised, rescued by the little folk.

The rhythmic thrum of the beasts

continued to the rustle and squelch of the undergrowth. The green pallor of the moonlight above was warming to the glow of dawn. Save for an occasional click as soft as rain-patter the pigmies were silent.

Peering as far over the branch as he dared the professor strained to see more of this strange rite of the great apes. Only as they passed in the spattered patch of moonlight could he catch a glimpse of each performer whose terrible teeth were bared in a snarl of ecstasy, the hairy paws pounding rhythmically upon the mighty chests. As far as the professor could determine they were moving, shuffling sideways, in the most primitive dance in the world, 'round and 'round the tree as if it were a maypole.

Just as he was wondering whether the beasts were given to this social amusement when the mood took them or whether, as with all savage tribes, the moon was the instigator, there came a squawk, the crack of a branch breaking and the rustling of leaves in the passage of a heavy body falling to the accompaniment of a terrified—

"Eh! Eh! Eh!"

Instantly the rhythm of the great apes ceased. There was a momentary silence. Then one of them seemed to bark a command, answered by grunts of rage from all sides. A hail of chatter broke out among the pigmies; the girl dragged at the professor's shirt, hissing:

"No good! Oh damn! No good—oh damn!" mixed with excited monosyllables.

He heard the *phtt* of arrows and much rustling of undergrowth from which arose savage grunts. Then immediately beneath him appeared a dim face with small, vicious eyes, black holes of nostrils and a cavern of a mouth set with wolf's teeth. Clicking violently the girl tugged at his shirt anew; but the professor, realizing that he could not compete with a gorilla in speed at the top of a tree, clutched the bough with his legs as he swung the useless rifle by the muzzle at a hairy squat body propelled upward with the ease and swiftness of an elevator.

The rifle-butt crashed on the shoulder muscles beside the conical head and as swift as the riposte of a skilled duellist a paw shot out, plucked the weapon from the professor's grasp, and holding by his prehensile feet, the great beast buckled the rifle in half as easily as a child would bend a reed.

A clutch at the professor's boot toe hastened his movements. As he turned he saw the slim leg of the girl disappear into the foliage above him; but as he stood up on the bough in a desperate attempt to follow her, his boots slipped. He grabbed at a small branch which tore away in his hand, was conscious of the gorilla yawning beneath him and clutching wildly—fell.

WHEN he grew conscious again he was aware of some one tugging at his arms. He began to kick and struggle, imagining that he was in the hands of the gorilla. Then a familiar "Oh damn! No good! Oh damn!" reassured him.

He was lying half-submerged in a morass beneath the great tree from which the girl was trying to drag him. The sun was incandescent through the patterned roof. He lumbered heavily out of the slough, covered in green slime from head to foot—but slime which had broken his fall and saved his bones. Around him was the gentle rustle and drip of the jungle.

"Good!" said he, sitting on a root, "but what's happened?"

He peered about. Near at hand was the elephant tusk sticking upright in the swamp; but there was no sign of the pigmies nor the apes. He sighed and wiped some more slime out of his eyes. Bending forward she pulled his green beard and laughed delightedly as he smiled.

"Good for you," he commented, "but where are your friends? Friends—where—no good—here," he translated with appropriate gestures.

"Good!" said she. "Go—go—go!" And pointing to the forest mimicked with both hands and feet suggesting climbing and running.

"Yes, yes! I get you!" assented the professor, "but——"

He made faces, beat upon his chest and grunted fiercely. She clapped her hands delightedly and pointed in the direction which the tribe had taken.

"I see. The gorillas have followed the tribe, eh? Lucky for us—or rather me. Good, brave girl! You stuck to me! Good!"

She appeared to comprehend for she laughed pleasedly.

"But what are we going to do? You—" gesturing—"me—many me—" tapping his chest and holding up two hands—"go—find—huh?"

Again she clapped delightedly.

"Splendid! Come along!"

He arose eagerly. But he dared not go without his hat or some covering. She understood after a while and mounting the tree with effortless ease, fetched his helmet from the nest.

"Good! Go! Go!"

But she started off toward the recesses of the forest. Immediately the professor sat down, saying, "No—no—no!" vigorously. Back she came and pulled his beard.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the professor exasperatedly.

"Oh, Lord!" she mimicked, and danced about laughing.

"Come on!" he exclaimed, starting up once more. But as he turned one way she went off on the pigmy trail again. The professor stopped and considered. The situation seemed more hopeless than ever. Apparently she did not understand; or if she did, did not wish to assist him to leave her tribe. Natural, after all, he reflected. He thought of exploring on his own, leaving her to follow or not as she wished; but—in what direction was he to go? If he could find an open glade he might be able to work out some idea of direction.

The girl had halted, watching, as if waiting for him to follow when—the report of a rifle startled him. He listened intently, fearful that his ears or his imagination had misled him, for a rifle meant either a white man or at least a semi-civilized native. Again came a report close at hand.

With a wave of the hand and a shouted, "Come on!" the professor plunged forward slipping and scrambling toward the sound quite regardless *mirabile dictu* of whether the girl was following or not, crazy at the call of environment which that shot symbolized.

Fifty yards beyond he was wading in swamp to his waist toward the silver of sunlight upon open water. Just as he hesitated again another shot rang out, directing the professor's attention to a canoe beyond the trees in which, like the gleam of the sun upon a house window, was a white helmet, sending him floundering on regardless of crocodiles or any beast or lady, yelling hoarsely.

The uncouth noises had attracted the occupants of the canoe. The paddlers stopped. The blessed figure in the helmet turned 'round to stare. The canoe began to approach the shadows of the overhanging forest. The professor ceased to yell; climbed into the handiest tree and waited. Not until the canoe was within hailing distance did the professor think of the girl. He peered around. She was close to him, but high up in a tree staring open-mouthed at the strange vision of the canoe. The professor laughed with relief and waved a hand to her, crying:

"Good! Good! Come! Come!"

But she did not seem to hear him. She stared—stared.

*"Qui est là?"* came a voice from the bright sunlight.

"Oh, God, me!" yelled the professor in his tremendous relief and recovering his sense of reality added—*"Americain!"*

*"Nom de Dieu!"* echoed the voice over the still water.

The canoe shot forward more swiftly under the branches into the swamp grass. A small, black-bearded man in the helmet gazed curiously at the gaunt figure of the red-headed giant with a green beard and slimed clothes. As the paddlers poled their way the two white men exchanged explanations. The little man was an Italian in the Belgian Congo service upon a shooting-trip upon the Semliki River. He had heard by runner of the loss of an American professor very distinguished, etc., and bade him welcome and congratulations.

"But," said the professor as the canoe was forced through the grass beneath him, "I demand a thousand pardons, but I have here—what would you call him—an extraordinary phenomenon—a lady white who has been brought up among these—your pigmies—very charming—and whom I wish to bring with me. She is, I assure you, the most interesting case I have ever encountered in my life."

"Enchanted!" assented the Italian.

"Come! Good!" began the professor, hanging on to a branch as he looked up toward the girl. But she was not there.

Then in the spattered sunlight beneath the forest roof he saw her cloud of amber hair upon the khaki coat, and one slim leg which blended with the green of the forest leaves as it vanished in the distance.

"Oh, damn—she's returning to the tribe," exclaimed the professor, and added: "Yet—we are only creatures of environment after all!"

# SENSE OF BALANCE

## By GORDON McCREAGH

*Author of "An Officer and a Gentleman," "Safe and Sane," etc.*

JIMMIE BELLEW put his feet up on the bookcase, knocked the ashes out of his pipe into an elaborate silver rowing-trophy, and relaxed in lazy contentment.

"Hand along the humidor, Walt," he requested.

His friend bestirred himself sufficiently to reach with the tips of his fingers a cunningly mounted skull with a brown porcelain lid and give it a shove which sent it plowing its way through an assorted litter of pencils and note-books and little wicked knives on the table to stop right on the edge by the other's elbow.

"Ha! Phenomenal judgment, as usual!" commented Jimmie, and proceeded to fill his pipe from the grisly relic.

The room was small and correspondingly cozy, with the battered furnishings and grotesque adaptations of natural objects to the needs of student life which are so dear to the heart of youth engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. The walls were hung with the usual varied assortment of pennants and boxing-gloves and photographs of athletic teams. The typical den of a young man whose thoughts were concerned more with the strenuous outdoors than with the honorable pursuit of medicine.

Jimmie blew two smoke rings, endeavored to throw the stub of his match through them, and then suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Yep," he said with finality. "I'm going to take a crack at it, and I think I'll get away with it, Walt."

Walter Jamieson smiled with the superior condescension of the man who has been through the thing and knows.

"You'll flunk," he said with conviction. "That physical test is a scorcher."

The younger man's face flushed just a trifle. Alert-eyed, hawk-nosed, hawk-faced generally, with a hard lean body to match, he certainly did not look as though any physical examination in the world should hold terrors for him. But the test they spoke of was the much-deliberated designing of an over-careful Government to weed out all but the most perfect specimens of manhood in the country. Jimmie defended himself eagerly.

"Flunk, me eye! Barring that sinus operation I had I'm as fit as any man alive. I'll pass everything else with a whoop; and you've told me yourself when you've taken me up that I have all the earmarks of a good flyer."

"Ocular and muscular balance entirely, my boy. You know darn well that for a couple of months after your operation you walked like a souse, and you used to get seasick and all that. Your canals are all wrong, man, and that cold, scientific revolving-chair thing will get you in a minute. It got 'Bud' Blakelock; they said he'd never be able to carry out a night bombing raid where he couldn't use his eyes; and Bud has been doing stunt stuff for years."

Jimmie leaned forward and lowered his voice with instinctive caution.

"It got Bud Blakelock, Walt, because he hadn't spent three years in a medical college. But it won't get me. I've been boning up on the flow of the lymph in the auricular canals and I know all the normal reactions by heart. I can fake that stuff as easy as winking."

The older man looked at him through half-closed eyes.

"Why not get a test from one of the faculty? Your trouble was two years ago; maybe you're quite all right now."

Jimmie fell silent. He knew that that was just what he ought to have done long ago; but like many a consumptive or heart patient he was afraid to face the truth. When he spoke it was in a low monotone, looking away from his friend.

"You see—it's this way, Walt. I want to do my bit, and I want to do it flying. And—I guess I'll fake the chair test."

Jamieson read the youngster's thoughts like a book. He smiled grimly.

"And you 'want to do it flying,' hm? Well, it has been known that a man may develop such a very keen sense of muscular balance as to overcome the ear defect; but there's more in this flying game than just the mechanics of it. Nerve, my boy, nerve! Or, rather, nerves, I should say.

"There's the psychological aspect of the thing. You may get away with the physical exam, but you'll know when you're up in the air that you lack that certain requirement, and that knowledge will break down your confidence. Without confidence some day your nerve will go; then you'll make the high dive."

"Rats!" said Jimmie with the omniscience of youth.

Jamieson smiled still, less grimly but with a pinch of determination about the lips.

"Quite made up your mind?"

"Yep, quite. Going to pull all the strings I can to bag a commission. Shoot in my application tomorrow."

"Well, then," the smile was faintly renunciative. "I'm coming in with you."

"You?"

"Yes, I—I think sometimes that I need something to give me a jolt to help me cut out this stuff. It don't fit in with flying." He indicated with a lift of his eyebrow the tall tumbler which stood at his elbow.

Jimmie jumped up with a glad exclamation.

"Good for you! I hated to say it, Walt, old scout, but I've been thinking that way for quite a while myself. Gee, I'm awfully glad! Why, with your experience they'll make you a gold-lined lootnant right away."

"Mm-m, maybe. Hope so anyway. Maybe when you get through with your ground stuff I'll have you for flight instruction; how'd that be?"

"Bully!" Jimmie enthused. "Let's go up together tomorrow."

JIMMIE BELLEW was dead right in both of his forecasts. His friend Jamieson, an experienced aviator, was called for examination with the least delay possible, and the next news that was heard of him was that he had been appointed to a second lieutenancy in the Army Signal Corps. Jimmy himself, after a period of waiting during which exhaustive inquiries were made into his mental and moral fitness for that most exacting service, finally received notice one day to present himself at headquarters forthwith for the prescribed physical examination.

As his friend had warned him, it was a scorcher. Five hours of exhaustive search by skilled scientists for the least possible traces of unsuspected defects which might some day result in disaster. As Jimmie had said, however, he passed everything else with a whoop. Five-feet ten of hard, wiry athlete, there was no reason why not.

Came then finally those delicate ear tests, the cold, merciless probing of scientific machinery for a possible clogging of the lymph flow in the semi-circular canals of the inner ear which act as the spirit-levels of the body. Jimmy was the least bit nervous; but confident withal. His unbounded confidence of youth had not been broken down—yet.

Hearing, of course, was perfect. Jimmy had no fear on that score; he could hear a whisper at twenty feet without difficulty, and he knew all the tricks of the examiners about pretending to hold a watch somewhere behind his head. But that deadly revolving chair, that inexorable contrivance which had blasted the hopes of so many aspirants to the great game. . . Jimmie took his seat with a half-smile of alert readiness. A sergeant grasped the lever and spun him rapidly.

"Enough!" called the examining surgeon suddenly, and looked into Jimmie's face with a watch in his hand.

Jimmy knew that his eyes ought to roll wildly for about five seconds. He rolled accordingly, while the surgeon ticked off the time and made a note of the result in his record sheet.

"All right! Again now."

This time the whirl was a longer one.

"Right! Stop! Now, what do you see? Point to it."

What Jimmy saw in front of him happened to be the bald high forehead of an eminent scientist. He knew that a normal person would point a foot or so to one side of it. Without hesitation he did so.

"Hm, remarkably quick reaction," muttered the surgeon, and made a favorable note to that effect. A short respite followed, and then Jimmie was told to sit forward with his head bent over his knees. The chair was then spun in sharp jerks once to every two seconds for about twenty revolutions.

"Now straighten up!" ordered the surgeon sharply.

Jimmie straightened up, and instantly heaved himself over, tugging at one arm of the chair as though to right a falling aeroplane.

"Hm, you'll do," the examiner smiled. "That's all, you can dress now."

Jimmie grinned covertly to himself and fled.

Yes, dead right was Jimmie Bellew. He had faked that stuff and got away with it—so far.

IN DUE course presently Jimmie was notified that he had been accepted as a candidate for a commission in the Army Signal Corps and was ordered to present himself again at headquarters, where the signing of various documents and the taking of sundry oaths awaited him. From there he was sent away to the great ground school at Newport News, a full-blown member of the United States Aeronautic Service.

At the ground school he learned all about stream lines and aspect ratios and angles of incidence and lift-drift coefficients, and the mysterious names of cloud formations with their approximate heights; and he washed acres of aeroplane wings with gasoline, and was initiated into the art of twanging brace wires like a banjo to see whether they were tight enough; and thereafter he graduated through the successive stages of third, second, and finally first mechanician, and was eventually promoted to "grass-hopping" in a low-powered machine.

All these things Jimmie, with the benefit of his previous instruction under his friend Jamieson, learned with unusual rapidity; and with the further benefit of those favorable notes on his report-sheet about the quickness of his nerve reactions he began to be looked upon as a very promising subject. He was picked out from among the many who were condemned for some failing or other to ground work for all time and posted for air instruction. Yes, Jimmie Bellew was marked down for a flyer—and only Jimmie knew about the clogged lymph in his left ear which had so much to do with his sense of balance.

In due course again Jimmie found himself commissioned as a second lieutenant and hustled off to Mineola for advanced instruction. There, in keeping with his lucky streak, he found his friend Jamieson, now a first lieutenant, and—unprecedented luck—he managed to come under him for tuition.

Those were good days for Jimmie. Long, filled-up days of hard work and teeming interest and earnest endeavor. Anybody would have considered himself lucky to have the personal interest of an experienced flyer like Walter Jamieson, and Jimmie progressed rapidly from mere passenger observation to being allowed to handle the dual Deperdussin control himself and to make wide, easy banks and long glides with a watchful hand of his teacher on the other wheel to check up the invariable beginner's mistake of over-control.

He began to get the "feel of the air," that sensation of the supporting planes having a tangible grip on something which is so markedly distinguishable from the emptiness of a side slip. He had the natural gifts of quickness of thought and presence of mind which go to make a good flyer, and presently he was promoted to "single hops"; he was allowed to take a machine up alone. He experienced the thrill of controlling immense power at immense heights, the wild exhilaration of speed. It was the call of the born bird-man.

Good days. But there was a tiny spot in the clear sky of Jimmie's contentment, a little gray spot like a mote before the eye which can be winked away but which is presently there again a little blacker than before. And Jimmie in his ebullient youth began to realize that perhaps the man with experience might know something after all.

Nerves, Jamieson had spoken of, the haunting knowledge of defect. Jimmie could whoop along at a hundred miles an hour and could make a sixty-degree bank; but how much of that was pure muscular sense of balance, he found himself wondering; and how much did he have to rely on that swaying air bubble in the red arc of the inclinometer attached to the dashboard in front of his control wheel?

That was a mechanical spirit-level, and it turned his thoughts inward to his own spirit-levels inside his head. Bud Blakely would never have been able to carry out a night raid when he could see nothing, they had said. To what extent, then, was that defective ear of his affecting him; and how much of his flying did he owe to his eyesight?

A troublesome little speck, that, which kept recurring with disquieting suddenness apropos of nothing.

Jimmie thought he would try one day to find out how long he could fly with his eyes shut. That surely would prove something. He climbed to a good three-thousand level to allow plenty of room for recovery in case of accidents, and then with his lean jaw clenched in determination and his hawk brows drawn down in a fierce frown he pinched his eyes shut hard. He sat tense while the machine hurtled along for nearly two minutes. The tight lips began to spread in a smile; it was easy, he said to himself.

Then a side puff struck him, and the machine heeled over to the left. Instantly he whirled the wheel over in the opposite direction and instinctively he opened his eyes. Immediately the great planes rocked over to the right; he had badly over-controlled in his anxiety. In a second he had righted the machine again; but his heart was in his mouth. When a man is three thousand feet up in the air it takes very little to make him taste his whole internal system.

After a few minutes the hammering of his pulse calmed down and he tried to analyze the thing. He had felt the tilt while his eyes were shut; that was all right. But was his over-control due only to over-anxiousness—or had he gaged the angle of deflection all wrong? And would he have righted the machine with his eyes still shut? He thought yes. But then again—maybe not.

That little speck was growing apace.

Later, reviewing the matter in the less strenuous environments of *terra firma*, Jimmie tried to persuade himself that the thing was quite all right; not once or twice, but many times he told himself so. The thing lived with him. He spent quite a lot of his spare time telling himself that nothing had been wrong—but he hated to try the experiment again.

That kind of thing is bad for the nerves of men who are supposed not to have any nerves. But it is surprisingly good for cankerous specks. Under the stimulus of suppression the dark growth throve amazingly and began to assume a horrifying shape. Jimmie was something of a mental analyst. He knew what was happening to him; those three desultory years of college had not been entirely wasted.

"That spook has got to be laid," said Jimmie firmly.

He hit upon a solution. On his next instruction flight, he said to himself, he would try the experiment again; under the controlling hand of his teacher it would be safe. The next time accordingly he did try. He shut his eyes tight and waited for the feel of whatever he might feel. For a while there was nothing to do, and then came one of the usual little dips which needed correction. Jimmie's analysis of self had not gone quite deep enough; he was still over-anxious and he made the same old mistake.

He felt the instructor in the rear seat with his greater leverage take the control firmly out of his hands and right the machine. For a star pupil this was a disgrace; Jimmie felt very much ashamed. But that vital question simply had to be settled. Presently he experimented again. This time the corrective force was applied with a jerk of impatience. Jimmie burned all over; but he set his teeth and determined to see the thing through.

Whatever might have been his conclusions about himself, there was no mistaking the instructor's attitude after that. With angry bruskness he took the control entirely away from his pupil, made a wide bank, and came down without further ado on to the flying-field. That lesson was over—and Jimmie had learned nothing!

As soon as they had climbed out:

"What the deuce was the matter with you?" snapped Jamieson crossly. "You were flying like a —— fool beginner. I have enough to do teaching the elementary stuff to that kind."

He seemed to be unreasonably irritable. It reminded Jimmie uneasily of the old days when his friend had looked a little too freely on the tall yellow tumbler. And Jamieson's face was unnecessarily flushed too. Jimmie wondered.

He would have liked to tell his friend all about his experiment, to have made a full confession of his trouble and asked for advice; but the opportunity was not ripe just then, he reflected; he would wait for a more favorable one. But somehow that opportunity kept postponing itself with heart-breaking indefiniteness.

Lieutenant Jamieson, in common with all the other instructors, was frantically busy, for one thing, with the pressing need of training as many men in one day as used formerly to be handled in a month; and for another, his irritation seemed to have settled on him permanently now. When Jimmie in desperation sought his friend at his quarters in the hotel one evening and made bold to mention the matter Jamieson laughed self-consciously and flushed and explained:

"It's an awful strain on one's vitality, old man, to take up fifteen or twenty boobs every day. But let's not talk shop now."

Which explained nothing. Or rather, not enough. Jimmie wondered some more.

In the meanwhile the days sped on, and Jimmie's unlaid ghost walked at his heels. But his confidence was still unshaken; he felt sure that his mistakes had been due to nothing more than over-anxiety; all he needed was to prove it to himself. Till suddenly there came the first big jolt which shook him into a realization that the man with experience not only might know something, but that he is usually right.

Two of the huge new Sperry search-lights were installed in the flying-field, and it was rumored that the more advanced pupils were to be given practise in night flying. Then only did Jimmie know that Jamieson had spoken deadly truth on that first day in his den. His little subterfuge had become a curse and had come home to roost. With the knowledge hanging over him that the little physical defect which had looked so inconsequential at that time remained still untested, his confidence, in the pinch, had broken down!

Jimmie had run away and hidden himself in his room to think over this new menace when the full force of it struck him with all its pitiless clearness. The speck had suddenly grown to maturity and taken a definite and horrible form. It had a shape and a name. It was Fear!

Second-Lieutenant James Bellew of the Army Signal Corps was afraid!

The thing was unspeakable, infamous; Jimmie fought it desperately; for long terrible hours he tried to convince himself that it was only a passing hysteria born of cumulative brooding. But the thing stood out before him, solid in its merciless accusation. There was no dodging it. Jimmie was afraid to take up a machine in the dark! He flung his arms out over the table and hid his face with shame.

A WEEK passed and Jimmie fought with his fear, and with the greater fear of having somebody discover his fear. A dozen times he made up his mind to test himself out once and for all; and a dozen times he went up and did not dare to try the fearsome experiment. The thing had got a hold of him. He would confess everything to Jamieson, he determined, and then with his co-operation he would decide the matter definitely on his next instruction flight.

But no instruction flights were forthcoming for Jimmie. Jamieson was too busy with the less advanced pupils and with experimental work on the night tests. And he was so confoundedly morose these days. No time could be wasted on a flier who shaped so well as Jimmie did—by day.

Then lists were posted with the names of officers who had been selected on account of their good showing for promotion to night practise. Jimmie's was well up near the top. He began to go about with a hunted look and to evolve desperate plans to postpone his turn until he should have found out about himself. He felt half inclined to go to Captain Wilson in charge of the flying-school, complain of ear trouble, and get himself reexamined.

That would be easy and plausible, and he would then be automatically relieved from flying-duty without anybody having found out his shameful secret. But here came in a curious anomaly. Jimmie wanted to be a flyer; the great game called to him irresistibly; and he had, besides, the pride that went with his lean-jawed type of face. Surely was Jimmie caught between two fires of his own making.

He haunted the night practises, praying desperately for some unexpected opportunity to go up as a passenger. Many passengers went up; but Jimmie's luck was running strong on the ebb now. Somehow it never so fell out that he was called; and junior officers are not encouraged to be importunate when there are a host of seniors who are anxious to experience a new sensation.

Then one night when the immense searchlights were stabbing through low-scudding layers of cumulus clouds and flooding rainbow billows on to the next layer a thousand feet above, Jimmie found himself standing near Captain Wilson. The flying-school chief turned to him.

"How about making a short jump for us, Mister Bellew? We want to see if we can pick a machine out from behind those cloud patches. Imagine we're being raided; the conditions are ideal for a practise."

Jimmie's heart almost stopped beating. The thing was upon him with appalling suddenness.

"Why, er—yes, sir," he managed to say. "Certainly. Er—can I take up Twenty-four?"

Twenty-four was his favorite machine—and Twenty-four's engine was out of commission! Jimmy calculated that he would be able to get away on the excuse and that presently, tired of waiting, they would send up somebody else.

"Sure," said Captain Wilson.

Jimmie hurried off, elate; and then the captain's voice calling after him chilled him to the marrow.

"Oh, wait a minute. I believe Twenty-four is on the sick-list. You'll have to take one of the others."

"Yes, sir," Jimmie mumbled. "Just got to get my helmet." And he fled.

As it happened, they did get tired of waiting. They would have had to wait beyond the patience of any man, for Jimmie was hiding in his room. Other fliers were a-plenty. Somebody else went up. Jimmie had got away with it—this time.

But that sort of dodging could not go on indefinitely. Jimmie was one of the young officers posted for night practise, and as such it was his duty to be present on the field during these experiments. Other occasions arose, and Jimmie's frantic excuses began to draw wondering attention. In that hazardous game there were always keen observers ready to pick up the slightest signs of wavering on the part of the less experienced students. People began to look sideways after Jimmie and whisper.

Jimmie's hawk eyes snapped up these covert glances in a second, and he burned all 'round to the back of his neck as he passed. Again the temptation came strong over him to report in to the chief medico for ear test. But Jimmie had come into this game with the intention of fighting for his country in the aviation service, and unless he should prove to be physically unfitted he was going so to fight. He was deadly afraid and deadly ashamed; but he gritted his teeth and hung on.

Jimmie roomed in the same hotel with Jamieson. He passed the latter's room every day on his way to his own; but it was not often now that he looked in on his friend. For one thing, his own primary impulse was to hide from everybody; and for another, Walt was not at all companionable of an evening nowadays.

Today, however, Jamieson called him in. The tone was both domineering and derisive. Jimmie entered and shut the door; perhaps this would be his long-waited opportunity. Jamieson sat slumped down in his chair with his feet stretched far under the table; his khaki tunic was carelessly open at the neck, and his cap lay on the floor. He regarded Jimmie for a long time with a dull eye while he kept nodding his head with sententious wisdom. Then his lip curled in a foolish caricature of his old slow smile.

"So it's come, huh?" he gibed. "What'd I tell you? 'S got you, hasn't it? Scared! That's what they're all saying. Afraid to go up."

Jimmie flung his head down on his arm and groaned. He had hoped for understanding and sympathy from his friend.

Jamieson rambled on.

"Yeah, dead scared—my star pupil too. After all I taught you—'fraid to go up."

There was an emotional self-pity in the tone that was almost maudlin. This wasn't like Walt Jamieson. Or rather, not like what he ought to be. Jimmie looked up quickly. His own misery was heavy enough; but his concern for his friend drowned out for the present all other considerations. Jamieson sat looking at him with foolish mournfulness. Jimmie had seen that look before.

"Walt!" he burst out with genuine solicitude. "You're not—you haven't been touching the stuff again?"

Jamieson flushed. Jimmie's suspicion was enough to straighten him up in his chair. He laughed shamefacedly.

"Well, hang it all, you know; it's an awful strain on the nervous system, taking up so many beginners every day; I'm all worn out, and I need some stimulant."

Jimmie stood up and stared at him with horrified eyes.

"But Walt, you—you can't," he whispered tensely.

Jamieson was suddenly perfectly sober. He passed his hand wearily over his eyes. He couldn't face his friend.

"Yes, I know," he said, quietly looking at the floor. "I'm going to cut it right out. Let's get together tomorrow and talk over things about both of us. I'm dead tired."

But tomorrow Jimmie was detailed to some routine work which took him off the flying-field; and the next day Jamieson was furiously busy with a flood of instruction, and was held late into the evening in a long consultation about something concerning the big search-lights. And on the third day the list had come down to Jimmie's name for night practise. So Jimmie incontinently reported himself sick; he did not dare to think of that flight before he should have settled things with his teacher.

Later, however, toward evening it was rumored that night practise was all off on account of some other more important thing on hand; so Jimmie put a bold face on it and presented himself at the flying-field pretending that he had heard nothing of the change of plan.

HE FOUND the night lit up like the San Francisco Exposition. Long, milky rays from half a dozen search-lights stabbed far up into the sky and cut the moonless blackness into a kaleidoscope of geometrical figures. It was just such another night as that recent one when he had so ignominiously fled; wide, shifting banks of cloud hurried overhead at various levels.

"What's the program?" he asked a sergeant who stood near with a sheaf of flight-report forms in his hand.

"Spotting experiment, sir. Imaginary raid from here on Philadelphia. Lieutenant Jamieson will go up and the lights will try to pick him up at both ends; they're just trying out their current now."

Jimmie watched the display, full of gloomy thoughts. He would have given his soul to go up with his friend on the long trip, for there surely they would be able to put his accursed problem to a test. But it was too late to attempt to make arrangements; everything would have been scheduled long ago—and in any case, it would probably be a one-man flight.

His surmise was correct. In a little while he saw a fast Curtiss baby scout wheeled out into the open and the mechanicians busy themselves about it. Soon the captain of the flying-school arrived with a group of senior officers. Captain Wilson looked up into the sky with satisfaction.

"Splendid night for the experiment," he remarked. "Bit gusty, though. I fancy we'll be able to follow him for at least six thousand, but I'll bet they won't pick him up on the other side before he is right on top of them. Hope he won't keep us waiting. Been rather a habit of his lately."

One of the officers stepped aside and spoke to an orderly. Jimmie could follow the man as he passed from one lit-up hangar to another, looking in all the likely places where a prospective pilot might be. He was away a long time. Captain Wilson began to show signs of impatience.

Suddenly a wild suspicion flashed into Jimmie's mind. Was it possible, he thought. Surely not. But Jimmie wasted no time in empty speculations; he stole behind the hangars and commandeered the first car which came to hand and raced out to the hotel. It was only a short five minutes. He rushed up-stairs and burst into his friend's room.

It was possible! It was a hopeless fact! Lieutenant Jamieson sat there a picture of dire retribution. His eyes burned bloodshot with fever; a wet cloth encircled his brows; and his face was propped haggard between hands that trembled like an ague patient's.

"Walt!" whispered Jimmie hoarsely. "They're waiting! Don't you know?"

The wretched man nodded wearily.

"Yes," he croaked. "I know. But—I can't fly tonight! I—I had a fierce day today, and—they rung this in on me unexpectedly—take advantage of the clouds; but——"

"But Walt, they'll—they'll be here looking for you in a minute, and—it'll break you, forever! Take a hold on yourself."

Jamieson shook his head in weary resignation.

"Yes, I know," he murmured again. "But—impossible!"

Jimmie looked at him with horror. Any second a man might arrive from the field. And there would be no excuse for an offense of that sort. The realization hit Jimmie like a tangible thing; there was force enough behind it to take his breath. It was preposterous to contemplate. That his friend should be irrevocably broken under the inexorable law of the service—his instructor, to whom he owed everything he knew! It was almost a blasphemy.

Jimmie's mind worked furiously. Suddenly he gasped, and his breath left him entirely. For seconds he stood just as he had been struck, a cold stone statue; and then his deep eyes began to burn and slowly his lips began to set. Then suddenly again he was electrified into swift, purposeful action.

"Lock your door," he hissed at Jamieson. "And keep it locked." And he rushed from the room.

Captain Wilson was striding a short impatient beat and fuming with aggravation when an automobile dashed into the field and drove close up to the waiting scout machine before it stopped. A lithe figure all muffled up in leather coat and helmet and goggles jumped from it. It saluted from the distance, called huskily: "Sorry to have kept you waiting, sir," and climbed agilely into the pilot's seat.

"All right, boys, I'm all set. Let her go."

Everything had been ready to the last little item for many minutes. A nimble mechanician spun the propeller over. It caught up the ignition with a roar, and the light little machine sprang forward like an impatient race-horse.

Captain Wilson whistled his amazement.

"Well, he certainly was in a deuce of a hurry to make up for lost time. Bet he's grinning all over to think he's avoided a censure."

But nobody could see the desperately serious eyes behind those goggles and the white knuckles which gripped 'round the control wheel and the grim-clenched jaw as the machine lifted from the ground and circled to the left in a steep climb. Jimmie knew nothing of any instructions which might have been given for the procedure of the flight. He knew only that he was expected to rise to at least six thousand feet and then to make for Philadelphia. But he didn't much care whether he carried out the program correctly or not; his only impulse was to get away from there, to gain time while his friend might recover; and his whole will was grimly centered on accomplishment, somehow.

Long shafts of light stabbed at him as he circled. They lit up the surrounding air like day, coming as a special blessing of heaven to enable him to settle down and pull himself together during the first few minutes. When the first cloud came between he felt an instantaneous qualm and sat tensely expectant while the machine hurtled on. But even here was a certain diffused radiance from the giant lights below. It was providentially helpful. He found himself making the old mistake of over-control and he set his will to getting a grip of himself and correcting that.

Presently a long pencil of light caught him again and seemed to hang itself on to the rushing machine; then another licked across, and back again, and caught hold; then more clouds. Then for an instant a pale flash passed him and Jimmie could follow the thin ray crisscrossing about, feeling into the night like a ghostly white finger; and then he was lost for good in pale, formless starlight.

And still he flew at a very fair horizontal! Jimmie's teeth relaxed a little from his bruised lower lip and he began to think with less rigid effort.

Far to the southward he could see through the flying clouds the beacon light on the summit of the town-hall tower. That was a fair mark for Philadelphia, and he knew then where the flying-field was. He headed the machine for it straight as an arrow. A hundred and twenty-five miles, his speed. If only he could hold her level for about forty minutes more!

JIMMIE hummed along for several minutes more at his high altitude on an astonishingly level keel. But the clouds bothered him. He put her nose down to it and slanted through long banks of them like a shooting star. It was darker down below, but less confusing. Several more minutes sped behind, and with them several miles. Jimmie began to wonder why he found the controlling so easy—just as though there was not a single disturbing puff of wind. His mouth relaxed almost into a smile. He began to feel the old elation of power and speed. And then, right in the middle of his triumph, something happened.

Jimmie heard a thin shriek above the roar of his engine, and instantly he felt the machine keel over terrifyingly and begin to slip. Frantically he tugged at the wheel, all his resolutions about over-control thrown to the winds. The machine answered beautifully. Nothing had suddenly broken, as had been Jimmie's first blood-chilling thought. But that sudden diabolical stroke was only the beginning. After that everything was either wildly over-controlled or hopelessly under-controlled.

All that beautiful security of balance which Jimmie had been congratulating himself on had vanished as though bewitched away from him. Something had gone terribly wrong with the controls, but there could be no stop for investigation. For twenty frenzied minutes the machine rolled and dipped and rocked like a leaf through the terrifying blackness. Jimmie's every muscle was tense with the readiness for instant action and the sweat rolled from him with the exertion of it. How the machine lived through it, he never knew. It was a mercy of Providence that he was kept too frantically busy to think.

When he finally managed to get the crazy controls in hand again he found himself sailing in a creamy glare of long convergent rays coming from far ahead and somewhat to the right. Mechanically he pushed the depressing control, and when he came to earth a few minutes later his mind was still in a whirl. He was just worn out, mentally and physically.

Officers crowded 'round him and shook his hand, proffering congratulations which were beyond his comprehension. How should they know that he had accomplished something which to him had been a fearful ordeal? He found himself feeling irresistibly tired and sleepy. He murmured evasions and excuses by the thousand and finally broke away and stumbled to a car and eventually to a hotel.

He had slept for about three minutes when he thought he woke up still dreaming. His dream was that his friend Jamieson was shaking him fervently by the hand and mumbling a vague jumble of gratitude and happiness and congratulations. One sentence impinged clearly on his consciousness.

"By golly, they all thought you were done for when that squall hit the world."

"Huh?" Jimmie sat up with sudden wide-awake interest. "How'd you get here so soon? 'D you fly through it too? Was that thing that happened a squall?"

Jamieson took him hilariously by the two shoulders.

"Fly? No siree. First train out. This is tomorrow morning already, son. And, 'squall'? Well, I should say! It was darn nearly a typhoon."

"Gosh!" marveled Jimmie. "God knows how I ever steered her. I was too scared to think. I just pulled everything in sight by instinct."

Jamieson threw back his head and crowed.

"Why, that's just it, Jimmie my boy. All this time you've been so darn scared you've been cured! Your canals are perfect! Phenomenal! You could never have done it on muscular balance alone. You've flown a stunt, son! You'll get all kinds of credit out of it."

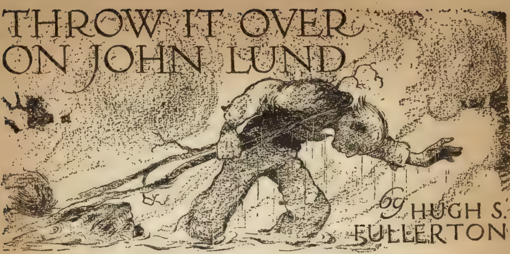
"Me?" Jimmie started from his bed. "Nobody knows me here personally—I was all goggled up anyway; and if by any god's chance they don't know you either, then—say! Did they get you? In the hotel?"

"No, nobody knows a thing. Thanks to you, old friend. You saved me from that. And—Jimmie boy, I—I guess you saved me from the other too. I saw a whole lot last night. When you went off like that, and I knew what it meant to you—and when that storm came up and you were in it while I lay there like a helpless swine, I—well, I'm done with that stuff, Jimmie—for keeps!"

"Then," said Jimmie stoutly, "Lieutenant Jamieson flew that machine here, and Lieutenant Jamieson is going to fly it back. I've already got more out of this thing than all the credit in the world. I've got confidence, Walt, old scout, confidence!"

His friend gripped his hand again, hard.

"And with confidence," he said slowly, "some day you'll fight for your Uncle Sam."



# THROW IT OVER ON JOHN LUND

by HUGH S. FULLERTON

*Author of "Cassidy's Consolation Kick," "Peterson and Forseille," etc.*

THE road through Platt River Flats is a trial to pedestrians, a despair to wagon drivers, a torment to motorists. It is a double rut of shifting sand winding through a wilderness of dense "slashings," heavy growths of stunted trees and a riot of blackberries in the undergrowths. Half concealed under these growths is an abattis of fallen cedar trees, and hemlock logs hurled aside when the timber pirates looted Michigan of its wealth of pine.

South of the bridge that spans the Platt this road is a tunnel through dense growths; the land is flat, and in places swampy. North of the bridge the road bounces over a series of short hills where blueberry bushes mat the earth and the raspberry and blackberry bushes and stunted trees strive to hold the earth against the torrential rains and the winds that beat upon that exposed point jutting out into Lake Michigan.

Wherever the roots are torn away the elements rip great holes in the sandy soil and the winds pile up the great shifting dunes to smother out other vegetation.

If one struggles through that trail he will, presently, emerge upon high land and gaze northward along the magnificent bluffs to the majestic sweep of the lake. On clear days, looking toward the Straits, he may see the islands the Indians called Manitous—the Foxes, and a glistening, silent mountain of white sand jutting out into the blue-green of the lake; the point called Sleeping Bear. From the hill tops he may look eastward upon a string of gem-lakes set down between great dunes.

But behind him lie the Flats—once a glorious country of majestic pines—now ravished and left to desolation, save for the scattered clearings where homesteaders battle against the wilderness.

In that arena, surrounded on three sides by orchard-crowned heights, bisected by the short-lived river that serves to empty the dune-prisoned waters of Platt and Little Platt into Lake Michigan the war of the Lunds and the Barneses was fought.

Lund, head of the tribe, was named John. He had come with his family of boys and girls, from Sweden, whether by choice or necessity none knows. The new world, of which, perhaps they had expected much, gave them little. John Lund had been a fisherman and a fisherman, turned farmer, seldom succeeds.

Perhaps there were high hopes, ambitions, dreams, that ended in a homestead in the wilderness. The tribe of Lund increased. The Winters were long, the harvest season short. Always the berry vines, the stubborn undergrowths, the rank weeds outgrew the corn and potatoes in the little clearing. The rains washed the sandy soil, the winds heaped sand over the crops.

Mrs. Lund, having proved more productive than the soil, yielded at last and John Lund was left with a swarm of boys and girls who ran wild—human undergrowth that thrived physically on berries and fish and game—and starved morally and intellectually.

Later, to an adjoining homestead came Henry Barnes and his three boys. They were from the East, farmers seeking cheaper land. Henry Barnes had theories and his chief theory was fruit. His boys were strong, had attended school and had profited by their father's education. To the Barnes boys the new life in the wilderness was adventure. The hunting, the fishing, the joy of clearing the land and erecting the stout cabin furnished them a prolonged vacation.

The beginning of the feud is shrouded in mystery. At first the Barnes boys had tried to be friendly and to include their neighbors in their sports and work. Perhaps the Lunds were envious. Whatever the cause the Lunds proved suspicious, unneighborly and had sullenly rebuffed all advances. The year after the Barnes family came into the Flats they started to erect a line fence between their homestead and that of the Lunds and John Lund resented the act.

Two or three times fences were torn down. Barnes protested; the Lunds denied. The boys joined in the quarrel and there was a fight in the road. Afterward whenever a Lund boy met one of the Barnes youths there was a fight and, later, the fathers took up the quarrels. Each time Barnes had emerged victor from physical encounters with his neighbor. Lund, sullen, bitter, planned to secure revenge.

One terror rules the Flats. Men who fear nothing else show anxious, strained faces when they see a curl of smoke over the wooded desolation. In time of drought there is little sleep and the whisper of one word will bring homesteaders leaping from their beds. The dread word is "Fire."

It was this terror that John Lund invoked against his foe.

ONE NIGHT the Barnes family slept in their cabin. The wind rose to a gale that swept down from the straits, roared between the Manitous, beat upon the old Sleeping Bear and howling as if with the voices of the long departed Manitous, descended upon the Flats and raged as if to tear loose the roots that held the soil against its fury.

On that night fire sprang up in the Flats, was fanned into fury by the gale and swept down from three points upon the clearing in which the Barnes family slept. Billows of flame leaped across the narrow plowground, the potato vines withered and burned, the pasture, dried by hot winds, crackled a moment and was black.

Faggots of burning brush, wind blown, rained down upon the cabin and, after a fight Barnes and his boys fled and all night they remained standing deep in the water of the lake, strangled by smoke, scorched by the flying embers. When the fire passed, they crawled from the water, gazed upon the smoking ruins of their house and crops—and vowed vengeance. That day Henry Barnes found where the three fires started.

During the Winter and Spring Barnes and his boys grubbed and cleared, worked as never before, and felt the pangs of hunger. They cleared land the fire had left untouched, grubbed the roots of burned bushes and saplings and, as they dragged brush and chopped away the tough branches of dead trees the father said, grimly—

"Throw it over on John Lund."

By early Summer a barrier of brush and bushes marked the boundary line. When Summer and the drought came they piled more brush and waited. In August a gale blew from the south, fast, strong and toward the Lund clearing. At midnight fire started and before daybreak the Lunds were homeless and their crops were ruined.

For more than twenty years the war raged. Other homesteaders came into the Flats, but few remained. Five times the fires had swept over the Barnes place, leaving desolation. Each time Barnes and his sons set to work in grim silence, enlarged their clearing, and after each attack Henry grimly ordered his boys to "Throw it over on John Lund." Each time his vengeance was heavier. He was patient and could wait until fire was most effective.

With each attack the Lunds, shiftless and indolent, became poorer. The Barnes clearing increased, orchards grew and bore fruit, the thickets were driven back until the buildings were beyond reach of fire unless the entire Flats were swept. The riot of weeds and berry bushes pressed closer and closer upon the Lund cabin, making revenge easier.

Twice, after the Barnes clearing became almost safe, buildings on the place had been fired in the night and each time Henry Barnes and his boys waited and, when the wind blew from the right direction, burned the Lund homestead. The Lunds, beaten, scattered. John died. The boys and girls went away, working on the lake boats, and only Jim remained.

Death claimed Henry Barnes, two of the boys married and moved West, and on the two homesteads lived Ben Barnes and "Yim" Lund, hating each other. The feud was not dead, but smoldering because Ben lived up to the creed of his tribe—to strike only in revenge and then strike harder, and because "Yim" feared Ben—feared him because he could not understand a man who could wait four years for the brush to grow in order that his revenge might be the more terrible.

That was the status of the feud when I came upon the scene, having built a shack on the lake. Ben was my nearest neighbor and we became friends. He was tall and straight, his long hair was white and his eyes were blue. He wore khaki clothes and moccasins, in Summer he went through the woods bareheaded and in Winter he wore home-made fox-skin caps and gloves.

THE Summer was long and dry. The thunder storms that brooded on the horizon each day poured their precious burdens into the lake or went away growling, toward the straits and the land parched. Berries withered on the bushes, the Indians became lean and, after a time, broke Summer camp and returned to their reservation homes.

The creeks and even the lakes dwindled in size, leaves curled upon the trees, the corn withered and grew yellow, the choke-cherries shrivelled into black beads on the trees and the evergreens became yellow.

Ben came to see me at longer and longer intervals and remained only for brief calls. He said nothing but there was a worried frown on his forehead and, as he talked, his eyes roved along the crests of the great, tree-clad hills beyond which lie the Flats.

When I visited his place he was busily engaged in mowing weeds, cutting down the berry growths in fence corners with a scythe and, as the corn was beginning to form ears, he cut several rows around the edges of the fields for ensilage.

It was his odd custom to sing a snatch from some old song at the completion of each chore, but for weeks he did not sing.

Late in August Ben stopped at the cottage in the afternoon. He had been compelled to go to town for supplies and was hastening back when I hailed him. We had been talking only a few moments when, suddenly, he sprang to his feet and, sniffing the air, he stood anxiously regarding the crests of the hills to the northward. He resumed his seat and the conversation but, within a few moments, leaped to his feet.

"I smelled smoke," he said. "Have you been burning brush?"

"No," I said. "It must be from the kitchen fire. This thing is getting on your nerves. Better forget it and stay to supper —I caught three fine bass today."

"I must be getting home," he said, "I don't like to be away long when the wilderness is so dry."

As he spoke one of the town boys came racing down the road in his automobile.

"Big fire up in the Flats" he yelled as he stopped. "The lookout at Point Betsie telephoned. He says the fire is this side of the Platt and spreading rapidly."

Ben who scorned automobiles and never had ridden in one, sprang across the yard and leaped into the machine.

"Get me as close as you can," he ordered.

"Wait for me," I called, grabbing a cap.

It was three miles from the cottage to the crest of the range of hills, and as the little machine reeled and lurched over the uneven road Ben urged the boy to greater and greater speed. We crested the ridge and stopped, gazing over the wilderness.

A strong, gusty breeze was blowing from the northwest, spreading a high haze of smoke over the Flats, but presently a curtain of lighter colored smoke seemed lifting and falling on the tree-tops and, in places flame shot upward through the thick pall.

As if resting upon the tree-tops was a dull glare and, in the middle distance a huge dead pine, rising over the lower trees, flamed like a torch. The acrid smell of burning wood and leaves came stronger and stronger as the gusty wind moved the smoke curtain.

To the west the sun was setting, blood red as seen through the deep smoke mist.

"She's a terror," said the boy, awed by the grandeur.

"Go on, as far as we can," Ben ordered.

The light machine ricketed over the hill, past Long Lake and plunged down into the tree tunnel. The air was clear here and even the scent of the fire was missing, although high above us, the spreading smoke pall brought the darkness more quickly. For two miles we rushed onward.

The smoke was beginning to settle lower. We could smell fire now. Ahead in the tunnel between the trees smoke poured as through a chimney and presently the boy, strangling and coughing, brought the machine to a halt. Ben leaped out.

"Go back," he ordered. "I'm going on."

"You mustn't, Ben," I said. "You could not save the house now."

"To —— with the house," said Ben. "Lunds' kids are in there."

Without another word he plunged forward into the tree tunnel, his head held low, running rapidly with the easy, ground-gaining gait of the woodsman.

The boy and I retreated to the hill and watched as night fell, slowly giving ground as the smoke became denser. Fire-fighters, volunteers led by the rangers, were rushing forward to battle with the flames. At midnight a lurid half-light covered the entire wilderness, but the breeze died and then blew gently from the south.

Weary fire-fighters, returning for rest and refreshment, reported that the rangers were holding their own and that from the north Empire had rushed rescuers, while from the east Beulah and Honor citizens were battling to restrict the area.

ALL night the boy and I waited for word from Ben and in the morning we went forward to the fighting lines. The fire still was raging, but was hemmed in now on three sides and great gaps in the forest showed where the axes and the back fires had stopped the spread of the flames. There was nothing to do but wait until rain brought relief, or the fire burned itself out and left miles of the wilderness a blackened desolation.

In the afternoon the fire-fighters reached the Lund clearing. House and barn were smoldering ruins. Three-quarters of a mile away Ben's buildings stood, scarcely touched. The fire had swept along both sides of the clearing, doing little damage. But, in the clearing not a trace of human life could be found. Ben had not succeeded in reaching his own home nor had the Lunds escaped in that direction.

Exhausted and with hope almost abandoned I joined the anxious ones waiting at the life-saving station on Point Betsie. Late in the afternoon a message, telephoned by a circuitous route around the burning area, brought fresh hope. Traces had been found of Ben and Lund. They had been cut off from escape in direction of Ben's clearing and had made their way to the Platt river. Clothing, cast aside in the stream, indicated that they had reached the water in safety.

Fire still raged on both sides of the short river. Timber, heavier than that that lined the stream further back was blazing. Whether Ben and the Lunds had attempted to ascend the river to reach safety in Platt Lake, three miles above, or had tried to descend to Lake Michigan no one knew. Either way they would be compelled to run the gantlet of fire which, in places, arched the narrow river.

Searching parties in boats already were on Platt Lake, seeking the fugitives. Five of us, inspired by hope of rescue, launched one of the old life-boats and straining upon the oars, drove it along the Lake Michigan shore toward the mouth of the Platt. Tall trees on shore burned like beacons, here and there the fire still raged in thickets, but the lighter underbrush had been burned off and the fire was dying out.

Our eyes searched the beaches and the dunes as we drove the boat forward just outside the surf of the bars but no trace of human life was discernible. Foxes, wild with fear, ran down the sand and plunged into the water, to draw back and whimper—caught between two terrors. Rabbits huddled close to the quaking foxes as if seeking companionship. Here and there porcupines waddled along near the water's edge in clumsy panic.

We rowed over the sandbar that guards the mouth of the Platt and waited. Presently the breeze lifted the smoke curtain a trifle and we pulled into the mouth of the river and gazed into the mouth of a furnace. The banks of the stream, piled with the tangle of long-dead logs, glowed sullen red and, a few feet above the surface of the water, the smoke hung black and heavy.

It seemed that no living thing could run that gantlet. Fifty yards into the river we rowed and were driven back by heat and smoke. At dusk we surrendered hope.

We were preparing to row back to the life-saving station to await news from the river's mouth when there emerged from the mouth of the furnace a strange figure—the figure of a man, blackened, hairless, with tattered shreds of burned cloth hanging from his shoulders.

He was waist-deep in water when first we saw him. Every few feet he stumbled, fell, disappeared for an instant, emerged and advanced. His progress was a series of fallings forward.

"Ben," we shouted and drove the boat forward again.

He did not hear us but pitched forward, struggled a moment and lay half-submerged in a shallow.

A moment later we reached out eager hands. Two of us leaped from the boat to lift him from the water—and saw the cause of his stumbling progress. He was towing a rude raft by a towline made from the vine of the wild grape. The raft was composed of dead logs, tied together with vines and, upon this raft were the bodies of "Yim" Lund and his two children. Lund and the younger boy were unconscious. The older boy, half conscious, was lashed to the back of the strange raft.

An hour later all four were in cots at the life-saving station and trained hands were dressing their burns and wounds.

BEN had reached the Lund clearing to find his foes fighting hopelessly trying to save their home. He had fought with them until the fire reached the buildings and they found themselves cut off from Ben's clearing. The younger boy had fallen exhausted by the heat and the exertion.

Carrying the unconscious boy Ben had led the retreat to the river. Twice they fought their way through the fire curtain itself and finally threw themselves into the water.

All night, standing and crouching in the river, they fought for life, Ben and Lund taking turns supporting the unconscious boy. At daybreak the fire around them grew less, but the smoke hung low and they breathed at the surface of the river. Then Ben started to make the raft by dragging logs that had escaped the fire because they were stranded at the water's edge. They planned to push the raft up-stream to Platt Lake, but when it was finished found themselves too weak to propel it against the current, so turned down-stream toward Lake Michigan.

The unconscious boy and his exhausted brother were placed upon the raft and the two old enemies pushed and dragged the raft down the swirling river between walls of fire. Sparks and at times large pieces of burning wood fell upon and around them, sizzling in the water or searing their flesh. They threw water upon the children and Ben removed his coat, soaked it with water and covered their faces. Twice burning trees fell across the river and almost barred the path. At noon they had passed the worst of the fire.

In mid-afternoon they heard the roar of Lake Michigan's surf piling upon the bars at the river's mouth. Safety seemed at hand, but Lund could go no further. In vain Ben urged and threatened. Lund fell in the water and could not rise. Ben lifted him to save him from drowning. For an hour they lay upon a little sandbar in the river, waiting for Lund to regain strength. Then Ben scented fresh danger. The wind had changed and he knew that the fire might come roaring back through the dense cedar swamp that had been scarcely touched.

He succeeded in reviving one of the boys and together they rolled Lund upon the raft and lashed him to it. His weight submerged the raft until all its occupants were in danger of being drowned. Ben had solved this difficulty by lashing the older boy to the rear of the raft so that his weight would lift the forward end and hold the heads of the others above the surface.

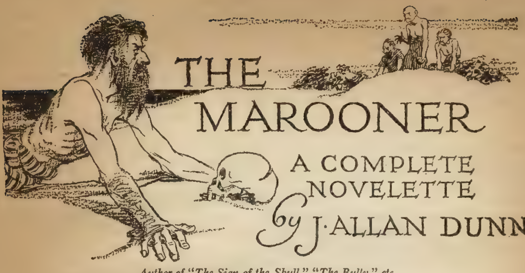
During the last mile Ben's mind was not clear. How many times he had struggled to his feet, fallen forward and dragged the raft a few yards he did not know.

Two days after we brought them to Point Betsie station a heavy rain washed the Flats clean and the breezes swept away all save the scent of dead smoke. It was a week before I saw Ben again. I knew he and the Lunds were recovering. One morning, as I prepared for fishing, Ben came down the road. His hair was gone, his face was disfigured with bandages and plasters but his blue eyes were glad and laughing. In his bandaged hands he carried a double-bitted ax.

"Come on over and help start a shack for Yim Lund," he said.

And as I looked at him in surprise he laughed and said—

"Feud's over."



# THE MAROONER

## A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

### by J·ALLAN DUNN

*Author of "The Sign of the Skull," "The Bully," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

### EL CAY DE LOS QUATROS HOMBRES

Like herrings cured in sun and wind
The four lie side by side,
Dry as a husk of coco-rind
Above the creaming tide.
*Buccaneer Ballades.*

"TURTLER TOM" was the man who discovered them and gave name to the islet. He had beached his sloop in the leeward lagoon the better to calk a leaking seam and found them lying on the sand just above tide reach, the desiccated rinds of what had once been human beings, mummified, distorted husks of shriveled skin and flesh and bone, their bleaching skulls wisped with hair, a few discolored rags flapping about the pitiful remnants.

What tortures had forerun the giving up of their ghosts on this arid shoal that thrust itself above the blue Bermudan waters, Tom could well imagine. There was no water on the cay, no shade, no growth but scanty herbage and brown palmetto scrub that survived between the rains by some miracle. He looked for identification traces in the shreds of personal belongings and found none.

"Dead of hunger and of thirst," Tom said to his Carib sailor. "What brought them here? There is no wreckage."

Then his foot kicked up an object buried in the sand and wind-drift. He stooped and picked it up.

It was a boarding-pistol of unusual design.

Forged of the same strip to which the trigger-guard was attached and deep-set in the wooden frame of the barrel was a heavy blade, *machete*-shaped, sickle-curving, a formidable weapon for close quarters after the discharge of the pan-primed powder and bullet, a thing designed by the genius of deviltry.

Turtler Tom had seen this pattern before though it was rare those days, the recent invention of a buccaneer scourge of the Caribbean. His moody eyes gleamed as he hefted the cunningly balanced weapon by its carved grip.

"Marooned, poor devils! Marooned by 'Long Tom' Pugh!" he exclaimed. "One of his bullies dropped it from his belt, likely, and it got shuffled under the sand. Come, Tampi, we'll bury what's left of 'em."

Turtler Tom bore the news of his grisly find with him back to Providence and to Port Royal and all along his devious water wanderings but the score of Long Tom Pugh was a long one and *los quatros hombres* lay beneath the weather-fluted sands on the cay that bore their name as only epitaph, unrecognized though doubtless not unmourned.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MERCY OF LONG TOM PUGH

THE chase had been a long one and Long Tom Pugh raged like a thwarted devil. From dawn until a scant half-hour of sunset Pugh's schooner had trailed the other, both vessels tacking on long reaches with canvas set until their tall masts bent like whips and their lee rails were gutters of foam.

Foot by foot Pugh's *Scourge* had overhauled the fugitive until the weapon from which Pugh got his name, the "Long Tom" couched in the bows, had found first its range and then its target, so that now the trader lay wallowing in the choppy seas off the tiny cay, hull riddled, foremast gone, its decks a clutter of rope and canvas that served as shrouds to five of its crew that the last charge of partridge had dismembered and disemboweled. Three men stood near the stern, weary, blood-stained, helpless, yet defiant, watching Pugh's longboat crowded with his bullies dance over the water to take them off.

"A murrain on the luck!" said Pugh. "A stinking shell-pedler! And I thought it a gold-carrier from the Plate! And we short of powder. But they'll pay for it, the dogs!"

He cupped his hands and bellowed across the crisp waves.

"Bring 'em away and let her sink, blast her. The wind's ashift."

The hair upon Pugh's broad and naked chest was black save where a streak of white marked where a cutlas slash had sliced his brisket, but the hair of his head and of his long beard was dyed a rusty purple as if it were stained with dried blood. His fierce face, deep-tanned, deep-scored, was split by a great, bony nose like the beak of a macaw with nostrils that were narrow slitted and twitched as he watched the progress of his boat. One black eye had Pugh and one of hazel and from both of them the devil looked out as it leaned on elbows across the sill of his brain, never free from the fume of liquor and never seemingly affected by it.

He was bare to his belt that was studded with pistols tucked into a gaudy over-sash and to which swung a hanger in a leather scabbard. Wide pantaloons were thrust into wider sea-boots of leather and he stood with his legs wide apart and his furry hands upon his hips. Almost alone of all his crew of forty ruffians who overcrowded the capacity of the *Scourge*, Pugh wore no earrings. The lobe of one brown ear lopped in twain where some desperate foe had torn away the ornament. His teeth were naturally divided and Pugh had filed them in the manner of the Madagascar savages, the better to characterize his evil countenance.

The sun dropped rapidly and the sinking schooner swashed about in water that was incarnadined with the sunset. Nine of Pugh's bullies were in the longboat, now returning with the three prisoners, forty-odd watched at the rail or made ready for the tack to come, for the fickle day's-end wind was setting them down to the shoals that outribbed from the cay.

The three men were set aboard, their arms pinioned behind their backs and shoved aft to where Pugh stood agrin. They were of varying age and stature and one was bald save for a fringe of hair. But there seemed some link of related features common to all of them and they looked Pugh fairly in the face though the blood was running into the eyes of one of them from a scalp-wound.

"So," said Pugh. "Ye thought to outsail the *Scourge* in that coffin-box of yours?"

The bald man answered.

"We could not fight. We had no weapons to match yours."

"Then ye would have fought, priest-face? Eh? Ye would have fought with Pugh?"

"I'll fight with ye now, an ye let one arm free," answered the other composedly.

Pugh's face grew purple with a rush of choleric blood. He whipped a pistol from his belt and leveled it, the hammer slowly cocking to the pull of his finger. Then he lowered the weapon.

"Sink ye for a bragging fool," he said. "But I will not kill in cold blood. I must remember my vow. I am a merciful man. Yet ye crow well. What is your name?"

"We be three Graemes."

Pugh glanced to where the yellow lettering on the pitching stern of the wallowing vessel showed the name *Three Brothers* and nodded.

"Of Nassau? Turtlers?"

"Aye. Our port is Nassau but we are Carolinans."

"So? What know ye of the schooner *Belle Isle* bound from the River Plate. She should be hereabouts. Speak up."

"Naught. Nor would I tell ye an' I did."

"Say ye so? Look ye, Graeme, I am a merciful man. And ye are a fool to be stubborn standing on the edge of trouble. It is in my mind that ye are lying. So, I give ye another chance. Tell me what ye know of the *Belle Isle* and join my crew.

We can find room for all of ye and a full share apiece if ye come willingly?"

Silence hung for a few seconds.

"No? Still stubborn? Then we but waste time, brethren three. Into the boat with them!" Pugh ordered as a stronger gust set the *Scourge* to shivering where she swung in the eye of the wind, uneasy and restive, her keen bows pawing the waves. "Give them the usual provender and set them on the cay."

For the first time something like anxiety showed in the faces of the trio.

"Ye would not maroon us on yon cay?" said the eldest Graeme. "'Tis waterless. Man, 'twill be worse than murder. It means ——"

"A fig for what it means," said Pugh. "Ye will shortly find that out. And I am a merciful man, Graeme. I am sending meat and drink."

The brothers exchanged glances. It was as if they nodded acquiescense with their eyes. The bald-headed one spoke.

"Then may God curse ye for a murderer and a coward, Long Tom Pugh!" he said. "May ye come at your end to linger till your tongue grows to the roof of your mouth and your belly shrivels. May your soul shred out into the darkness and whine in the winds for mercy."

He suddenly shot out neck and head and spat full in the buccaneer's face.

Pugh turned livid and his eyes became points of fire. He snatched the scarlet bandanna from the head of one of his crew and wiped his face and beard, then flung the gaudy silk overboard where the wind snatched at it and whirled it far astern.

"Ye are a cunning knave, Graeme," he said and his voice held hate and breathed it as an iron holds heat. "I would that I had time to handle ye aright. Yet, before ye die, ye will wish a hundred times that I had shot ye as ye would have me do. Over with them! Ye will find company ashore, Graeme. Ask the four I left there a while ago to play hosts to ye."

"And speed back," he called to the quartermaster in the stern of the longboat. "These are tricky waters. Ah, look at that!"

The foundering schooner had taken her last sudden plunge and disappeared, but her maintop spar protruded from the water, warning of a shoal toward which wind and sea were slowly backing the *Scourge*.

"We'll pick ye up outside!" roared Pugh. "Let her come up! Pay off there! Starboard tack!"

He leaped to the wheel, active as a tiger for all his bulk, and laid a guiding-hand to the spokes to aid the helmsman. The lithe schooner gathered way and hurled herself ahead as she caught the wind in the shallow hollows of her sails, close-hauled, fighting free from the threatening reefs and bars. The longboat sped to the shore, tumbling out the three Graemes, hurling after them two kegs, one of which fell short and swashed about in the tide fringe till two of them retrieved it.

The boat went racing back after the *Scourge* as, clear of shoals, it once more hung in the wind. The bullies clambered aboard and left the longboat, riding to a line, to lunge after the schooner like a leaping dog after its master. Then the sun fell below the horizon and darkness jumped up from its ambush beyond the rim of the sea.

Presently a spark of light appeared on the leeward side of the cay and grew to a crackling radiance as the crisp palmetto fans flared up. About the fire squatted the three brothers, their faces grim in the ruddy glow as they took counsel.

"I would not care so much, save for Margaret," said Will Graeme, the youngest of the three. "The babe was to come this week. I had thought to be at home." And a spasm contracted his features.

"Take heart, lad," said John Graeme, the bald-headed. "We will win through. Aye, and settle accounts with Long Tom Pugh. The rains are not so far off. A month at most. We can eke out. We will. Fret not, Will, the child will be born ere she begins to worry over ye. But we must go carefully. Just keep the life in us till the rains come or we sight some ship. Mayhap we'll get enough from the wreck to build some sort of craft."

"The current swings about the cay," said Alec Graeme. "There was no driftwood on the beach. And we were chased by the *Scourge* far off the travel lanes. Ye heard what Pugh said about company? How he left four here? This is Quatros Hombres Cay where Turtler Tom buried them that Pugh marooned."

"Yet we will win through," said John Graeme. "I'll handle the rations. Alec, see if the water-keg is full. We can do without tonight."

"'Tis but a double anker," grumbled Alec Graeme as he rolled the keg closer to the fire and John Graeme did the same with the barrel of meat. "Now may the flesh rot on his bones while he lives in anguish!" cried Alec passionately. "This is no water anker! 'Tis brandy! And the other bully beef! The lying, grinning devil with his talk of mercy! Brandy and salted meat and the rains a month away!"

## CHAPTER III

### THE INN AT PORTO BELLO

Oh, sing me a song of a rover,
  A tale of the Spanish Main,
Of a buccaneer living in clover,
  And drink to the jolly refrain.

Ho, yo ho, as black as a crow
  Is the flag the bullies sail under;
To Long Tom Pugh and his rollicking crew
  And the roar of his carronades' thunder.

Ho, yo ho, for the swing of the surge,
  Show me a schooner as swift as the *Scourge*.
Gallant and free are the men of the sea
  Who sail under Long Tom, the Wonder!

THEY beat out the time of the tune with their rummers and mugs on the scarred tables while their crimson faces loomed through the blue haze of the tobacco-smoky, low-ceilinged room like sundogs through a mist. The song ended and Pugh tossed a couple of gold pieces to the singer who spun them with a flick of thumb and finger and roared for more liquor.

There were twenty rowdy, blousy wenches, *mustees* most of them, bred of full whites and quadroons, olive-skinned and flushed with their portions of the tankards thrust upon them by the pirates who shared them, each woman with either arm about a buccaneer, ogling, cajoling for a dividend of the freely spent, lightly gained gold. Presently the wail of violins joined in a pulse-quickening hornpipe. There was a scuffle for partners, half-jovial, half-ugly, and a score of couples thrust back chairs and tables and swung and lurched upon the sand-gritted floor.

Long Tom Pugh and his bullies were in Porto Bello. There were no hovering king's ships to annoy and the town was theirs, as long as their gold lasted. Pugh did not dance. He sat apart with the quartermaster of the *Scourge* and his mate and chief gunner, his evil face seamed in a smile that split his henna-stained whiskers.

"I'm done," said the quartermaster, glowering at the dice he had just cast. "I'm clean as a whistle, curse the bones. There's the devil's own luck in them!"

"There should be," answered Pugh as he scooped in the stake. "They are shaped from the thigh-bone of the man 'Roaring' Raines left to guard his treasure-chest when he buried it on Ransom Cay. Raines buried it and I found it with the skeleton of the poor devil he took ashore to do the digging sprawled atop of the chest. Raines didn't figure on the shifting dunes.

"We got hold of a member of his crew and persuaded him to tell which cay Raines chose to leave the loot on. He told us what he knew and luck did the rest. The wind had blown the sand and there was the hand of Raines' grave-digger sticking up like a sign-post, beckoning us to come and get even with Roaring Dick. And my bo'sun shaped me the dice. Try your own, man. Come, you've a ring there I fancy. I'll stake a gold doubloon against it."

The quartermaster hesitated, then drew the ring from his finger. It was of crude workmanship, fashioned to form a snake of gold with a flawed emerald set in the flat of the head and two diamond chips for the eyes.

"I'll set it against five and no less," he said.

"Three and no more," answered Pugh and piled the stake. A minute later and he stuck it on his own hairy digit.

The quartermaster smothered his resentful oath in his tankard.

"Where did ye loot the ring?" asked Pugh, twisting it about. "I do not recollect seeing it in the sharing."

"I got it from a wench," lied the quartermaster.

He had taken it from the finger of Will Graeme when he had bound his arms behind him. And in this, he, the chosen representative of the crew in the division of spoils, had cheated. But the lie passed.

"She gave it ye for your handsome face, I suppose," said Pugh and the others at the table laughed, for the quartermaster's face was pox-pitted so that his features seemed to have crumbled.

"A winner's jests come easy," he growled and the look he gave Pugh was murderous.

The scrape of the fiddles and the shuffling of feet ended and once more the sweating servers scurried about replenishing the empty mugs. A fight over a girl broke out in a corner and the *mustee* ran squealing from the grappling men.

"Bring 'em out in the open," bawled Pugh.

With all the blood-lust in them flaming from the liquor they had swigged, a dozen men hustled out the combatants to the open space between the tables.

"Take away their knives," ordered Pugh. "I'll lose no good men for the sake of a worthless wench. A doubloon to the winner!"

Left to themselves the two pirates, roaring like bulls, rushed at each other swinging arms like flails, locked, swayed and fell together to the floor. One got astride of the other and gripped his throat while the under man's knees played a tattoo against his back and he squirmed like a seal. The topmost lost his balance and they rolled over and apart to scramble to their feet amid the yells of their comrades.

There was no science to it and much comedy, for one was squat and bow-legged and the other lanky and gangling. But the latter bashed the short one in the face with a straight left so that his nose seemed to split like a rotten pear and the blood spurted. The squat man bellowed, grabbed his long opponent about the buttocks and sent him hurtling over his shoulder to smash against the table-leg with his head.

The unsound support splintered at the impact and the table pitched forward with all its contents while the room echoed with ribald laughter. The lanky man lay stunned and was hauled out by his feet to have a tankard of ale dashed in his face as the victor advanced to Pugh for his doubloon.

A door had opened in the rear and a girl came in whose appearance drew the swift attention of those nearest to her, halting their jesting and buffoonery to a silence that rapidly spread so that she advanced in a strained quietude to the center of the sanded space where she stood for a moment before she gave a nod to the fiddlers and began to dance.

She danced like a reed in the wind, swaying with infinite grace of posture, her feet scarce leaving a circle less than that of an ordinary platter. She was tall and lissom, though full-busted and she looked like a half-opened flower, fresh, unsmirched with paint and holding an air of aloofness that was eery.

Her dark gray eyes, almost violet at times in the uncertain lights, seemed to gaze far beyond the tavern walls, she danced as one might dance at will on the sea-sands, as a nymph might dance, strangely incongruous in that assembly of gross-passioned men, unconscious of her surroundings. Her golden hair was coiffed in classic simplicity and her sable draperies were at odd variance with the tawdry gauds of the *mustees* who viewed her with palpable disfavor yet shared the silent concentration of the buccaneers.

The air the fiddlers played was soft and low, a crooning rhythm that sounded like the murmur of surf after a storm or a breeze playing amid young birches. And, as she danced, to the masterful, masterless men about her, came visions of Spring woods where hyacinths and primrose clustered, of brooks winding amid lush sedges, all set in the far-off days of their own innocence.

The rhythm changed and she floated 'round the room, light as thistle-down or a foam-bell, her eyes passing over the rough, seamed faces with no hint that she regarded them as indices of humanity, hypnotizing them by the sheer beauty of her dance. Then she snapped her fingers to the players and they swung their bows to a wild *tarantelle*. The violet eyes became black, sudden roses flashed out on her cheeks, her posturing became of the flesh rather than the spirit, provocative, yet so infinitely graceful that it still held the audience in thrall though their heads swayed to the increasing lilt and their pulses pounded.

She was no longer a foam bell, but a curling wave that leaped, upcurving, cresting to the very feet and then swept back in furious eddies that bewildered with their whirl.

A fiddle-string snapped. She stopped, ivory arms flung back, audacious, challenging, as a shower of coins fell upon the floor and one of the pirates, snatching a tambourine from his quondam consort, gathered up the gold and humbly offered it to her as she courtesied low before Long Tom Pugh, whose eyes were ablaze and whose beaked nose showed its ridge of bone as the nostrils twitched and dilated and the great chest lifted and fell.

HE ROSE, sweeping the table aside and, in one great stride, reached and raised her, crushing her to him while his bearded lips sought hers. Then he drew back with an oath as she twisted free and stood, less at bay than ready for attack, a dagger she had drawn from between her breasts flashing in her hand, her eyes holding Pugh's while one of his great paws fumbled at his beard where blood was oozing its way through the mat of hair just beneath the line of his chin.

All breaths were held, sensing the verge of tragedy. But Pugh, still fumbling at his beard, slowly retreated until his other hand, back-stretched, felt the edge of the table he had pushed aside. His eyes, no longer blazing, but ablink, were fixed on those of the dancer and, as he leaned against the support, he shivered.

"She is a witch," he muttered. "Look at her eyes. They are not human! By God, she missed my jugular by an inch! She would have let the life out of me!"

And still the room hung on the scene, marveling to see Pugh so strangely tamed yet conscious of the weird power of the woman. Pugh's hand fetched up against a rummer and tightened about it. He lifted it and drained the raw *caña* it contained. As he set it down the dancer's gaze suddenly fastened on the ring he had won from the quartermaster.

She seemed to stiffen in a sinuous pose, while the arm that held the dagger glided like a white-skinned snake, back in an almost imperceptible movement that presaged a lightning thrust. It came, but only to sheath the knife between her breasts once more, and she laughed.

"Know ye not ye must not touch me?" she asked, and her voice, clear as a bell, seemed to come from afar off like the sound of a distant chime. "Ye must not touch me, for I am Death," she said. "I am the White Death and this dress is the shroud of Love." Her eyes, absolutely fearless, burned in their absolute belief of what she spoke to Pugh's brain and to all in that still silent room. The light in them was uncanny, as if the soul no longer reigned behind them in its seat, they were lambent with the high glaze of madness. And they held Pugh as a snake charms a bird.

"You are Death?" he muttered. She nodded.

"But you need not fear me yet," she said. "I have not harmed you. Only warned you. Did I not dance for you? And you sought to take me. Know ye not that it is Death who comes for you?"

She advanced her hand and the great bulk of Pugh cowered. He crossed himself and many of his men did likewise.

"Where got ye that coiling ring about your finger?" she asked.

He took it off and offered it to her.

"Take it," he said. "Take it and go."

"There is blood on it," she answered. Pugh looked shudderingly at the circlet and laid it on the table, not realizing it was his own gore from the fingers that had pressed his neck that stained it.

"It is yours," he said shortly. "Take it."

"Nay, I have not yet earned it. Nor have ye told me its history. Surely it has a history? Mayhap it was a love-pledge once upon a time? Tell me. Then I will sing for ye and so I shall have earned it."

"I know naught of it," said Pugh. "I won it but now from him."

He nodded at the quartermaster and the woman's eyes scrutinized the pitted face for an instant.

"Ye shall tell me presently," she said, and smiled.

And with her smile the dread that had stiffened the face of the quartermaster passed and he grinned at her with yellow teeth. The witch had turned siren and his vicious blood responded.

"I'll spin the yarn," he said. "I am not so timid as others." And he glanced sneeringly at Pugh who had sat down and was shading his eyes with his hand.

"No?" she asked. "Then why do ye make the holy symbol?" For the pirate's bundled fingers still touched his tunic above his heart. "He who woos Death does not always win. Yet Death is kind."

She stepped back and commenced to sing.

Where lies he now?
  Lost love of mine;
His marble brow
  Is creased with brine,
His lips caressed
  Are chill and gray;
How warm they pressed
  The other day.
His body swings
  To shifting tide,
No twilight brings
  Him to his bride.

Yet do I know
  Our tender vow
Shall ever bind,
  As then, so now.
When fails my breath,
  When life grows dim,
I'll thank grim Death
  For finding him.

It was a dirge that changed into a pæan of joy. While she sang there was not a soul-calloused sea-rover, not a hardened drab but sighed to the memory or the lost hope of love, tender, gallant and enduring, not one but thrilled to the credence of the last triumphant lines. In a spell they sat as she took the ring and glided from the room, the tambourine with its golden offerings untouched.

Then Pugh shook off the mood that compassed him.

"Go, bring her back," he ordered. "Fiend take me, but I'll teach the jade. I'll take her, aye, and break her till she sighs for death. Rot me, up and after her, I say."

No one moved till the quartermaster, with a contemptuous look at Pugh, got up.

"I'll find her," he said. "But I'll not promise to bring her back."

Pugh started up, coughed and set a swift hand to his mouth. The stab had pierced through to his throat and his mouth had filled with blood as his anger quickened its flow. And the quartermaster, catching up the tambourine as he went, vanished into the night outside.

The tavern-keeper came hurrying with a bowl of water and a pannikin of rough salt. Pugh swallowed his own blood and waved him aside.

"'Tis no hemorrhage, fool!" he said. "Only a scratch. Unless," he added, half to himself, and his ruddy face paled, "the witch poisoned it."

"Best let me fetch a leech," said the tavern-keeper. "Indeed I know little of the wench, save she is a bit mad. She comes from Nassau, some say. She has an infant. She lost her man at sea and it crazed her. But this is hearsay. She has danced here and elsewhere and sings among the sailors, seeking news of her man. Yet she seems not to know her own name. And she was ever harmless until now."

"I have a leech of my own," said Pugh. "If the fool is sober? So, Folsom, here ye are. Take a look at this slit the she-devil put in me. Where is the quartermaster?"

"Gone after the witch," said the discredited *medico*, who had joined the outlaws of the *Scourge*.

"May she slash his weasand agape," said Pugh. "We would be well rid of both of them. What think ye of the wound?"

"I think 'tis clean. Some ointment and a stitch, maybe——"

"Then come off to the schooner. Lads, we sail on the flood close after dawn. I have news of a gold-ship. And," he added as he left the tavern with the leech, "if she bewitches the quartermaster we'll sail without him. He is too solid with the men now, for my liking."

As they went down the beach the chorus broke out again behind them, muffled by the closing door:

Ho, yo ho, as black as a crow,
  Is the flag we bullies sail under,
To Long Tom Pugh and his rollicking crew
  And the roar of our carronades' thunder.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARGARET GRAEME

IT IS hard to say if Margaret Graeme was mad. Perhaps it was merely the passing fever of a brain lit by the exaltation of one great concentration of purpose, bred of a mating love and hope—the finding of her man. Will Graeme had promised to be back for the birth of their son; no ordinary circumstance would have held him.

Now he was two months overdue and for six weeks she had been seeking news of him, bending her will to the best ways and means of cajoling sailormen, the use of her beauty, of her voice and of her grace, so used as to keep herself inviolate for Will. So had grown in her a wondrous cunning coupled to her gifts of dance and song that had bubbled up within the sweet fountain of her body in the happy days of love and mating.

She had thought of the *boucaniers*. There were other perils of the deep, but it was not yet the season of hurricanes, and the *Three Brothers* was a stanch and speedy craft, while Alec and John and Will formed a trio of mariners who were innate masters of the sea rather than doomed to be its playthings. In her six weeks of flitting from port to port she had heard more than once of Quatros Hombres Cay and the way of Long Tom Pugh and others of his calling.

Earlier pirates had been different, men big in a crude way, moved by fits of cruelty or generosity as the mood swayed them. Sometimes they would kill, kill for the sheer joy of blood-letting, drunk with the fight, the reek of powder and the drive of blade or point through elastic flesh and stubborn bone. And again they would give some gallant foe his ship after they had glutted their fancies from the cargo, or send the survivors adrift in an open boat to take their chance of landing after having sworn them not to inform.

But Pugh and his ilk took no chances. They were marooners, leaving their victims on desert cays to perish, destroying all witnesses, yet styling themselves merciful.

And Margaret's grief-shocked brain had determined that buccaneers had taken her Will and his brothers. True, the *Three Brothers'* hull held nothing worth the rifling but she had the heels of the trading fleet and the pirates were apt at changing to a faster or sounder vessel than their own. On these lines Margaret had hidden her identity, asking rather than leading up to information, listening, piecing together, charming her crews and selecting by her woman's wits the natural chiefs among them.

Even the child came second. With her on her wanderings went a coal-black West Indian negress, a giantess in size and strength, a child in loyalty and admiration of her golden-haired mistress, who played nurse to the infant and guardian to the mother.

Margaret knew, when she left the tavern, that the pox-pitted quartermaster would follow her. It was the compelling urge of her sex, grown to its utmost power in the hothouse of her love, that called to such rough spirits yet held their coarseness in check by the purity of her own spirit's flame. She was a Circe and she bent men's passions and wills as one might weave osiers to a basket.

As the quartermaster, the hot blood flooding his brain to one mad desire that was only tempered by a certain dread, emerged, tambourine in hand, its golden coins jingling slightly on the taut parchment, out from the heated tavern into the quiet night, he saw, between the interlacing shadows of the palms upon the shell road, silver where the moon lustered it, the figure of the dancer, vague, uncertain, almost ghostly in the checkered light that shifted with the play of the land wind in the plumes of coco-palms. She had a *mantilla* about her head, but he caught the gleam of her eyes as she glanced his way, and marked the play of her beckoning hand.

Involuntarily he crossed himself, then swore at his own weakness with a crude sea-oath and followed her in his lurching deck-gait. Followed, for she glided ahead without ever looking back, on beyond the clustering houses of the port, on to where a path led through the sea-bush. She went fast, and the quartermaster, his heart pounding a devil's jig against the cage of his ribs, lunged after, striving in vain to gain without breaking into a run, from which the same latent, tugging fear at the back of his inflamed brain prevented him.

They came into a scanty clearing where a mud cabin stood and a little stream flowed from the hills and spent itself in the sand. An owl hooted and the quartermaster checked his pace at the omen. It might be the witch's familiar. But he was a slow-witted man, save in the practise of his calling, and the strength of his body and the triumph of a hundred personal skirmishes had endowed him with a sturdy belief in his own prowess that built up a dogged courage born of the flesh rather than the mind. His purpose once set, he would hold to it. And he followed.

Lights glowed suddenly in the two visible windows of the little cabin and he saw the door open as the woman reached the threshold and, turning for the first time, drew aside her *mantilla*, showed him the witching oval of her face with its gleaming eyes and, with the tiniest beckon of her head, passed in.

There was but one room in the low-roofed place. By the light of two brass lamps burning whale-oil, he saw that it was empty, saw too, that the only other door, at the back, was barred on the inside. There was little furniture. A low bed stood behind a screen and, near the pillows he saw what seemed a small bundle underneath the coverlet.

Who then had opened the door or lit the lamps? He felt the hair rising at the nape of his neck and the incipient goose-quills lifting down his spine. His hands tapped the pistol butts in his belt and the handles of his dirks and the swift wish came to him that he had a silver witch-bullet in the muzzle of one of the former.

BUT the woman had turned and, radiantly alluring, pointed to a rough chair in which he sat, even while he felt little cold beads break out upon his brow beneath his headkerchief. A slight draft caused him to slightly turn his head and roll his eyeballs toward the door through which he had just entered. It was slowly closing of its own volition. The dancer was holding out a pewter mug toward him.

"It is *caña*," she said. "I will pledge you first."

She sipped a little and swallowed it. He could see the moisture of the liquor on her crimson lips and he took the mug and drained it. The ardent stuff fired him, his eyes became bloodshot and he leaned toward her, swaying a trifle like an amorous bear. God, but she was beautiful! White—and tender and sweet! But some tingling touch of restraint still thralled him.

"What if I should take you, mistress?" he uttered in a deep guttural.

She surveyed him unafraid with her shining eyes. They held a hint of amusement.

"You would be dead long before the dawn," she said, and the utter conviction of her voice hammered home to him the feeling that she spoke sooth.

"Did I not tell you I was Death?" she almost crooned. "I could kill you in a hundred ways, so very easily. They say I am a witch. You think so as you sit there. Wouldst see my familiar? Look at the window."

Swiftly she lowered the wicks of the two lamps till they barely showed. The moonlight came in at one window and made a wedge-path to where the quartermaster sat. The path began some two feet from the window where the shadow of the wall below the sill ended. It was very white and luminous, squared off by the woodwork of the panes.

Slowly a blotch began to eclipse its brightness. A drumming noise commenced and quickened as the blotch enlarged and the pulse of the mariner beat faster until it seemed as if the sound were that of the blood flowing through his own veins. Then, suddenly, a face leered in at the window.

The face of a demon, livid, emitting a pale lambency that set off a great, grinning mouth set with pointed tusks between which lolled the tip of a lusting tongue, staring eyeballs floating in white circles, wide nostrils eagerly agape and crisp hair that seemed alive with mysterious lights. The skin was black, like that of a devil from the pit, and it appeared fungused with the phosphorescence of decay. It blotted out the moonlight and shone by its own radiance.

Santa Maria! This dancer was no woman! She was a ghoul, a succubus! The quartermaster snatched a pistol from his belt and pulled trigger. By some mischance the powder had fallen from the pan and it missed fire. But his brain gave no such ordinary explanation. The face was still there. And, by the living God! A snake was twining through the tresses! He flung himself at the door that opened outward. It was of solid hardwood and it resisted his heavy thrust as if it had been of iron.

Behind him the dancer laughed. He turned, sweat clammy on him, at bay, fumbling for a knife. The lamps were turned up again, the face had gone.

"Sit down," she said. "Since ye can not go, sit down. I mean ye no harm."

"No harm? Then why——"

"So ye should not harm yourself by trying to harm me. Take more *caña*."

She handed him a fresh measure and took a pipe from a stand, filled it and handed it to him with a paper spill that she had lighted above the flame of her lamp. Half-mechanically he drank the liquor and accepted the pipe, sitting down once more.

"Are ye human or what?" he asked, gaining false courage from the *caña* and the homely elements of her hospitality. "Or have ye tricked me? By the wounds of God's Son, that head cast a shadow on the floor. 'Twas no spirit!"

He half rose.

"Wouldst try another pistol at it?" she asked smiling. "Or will ye go outside and seek it. The door is open now. Or closed, as I will. But I am flesh and blood. See."

She took his rough hand in her smooth one and set it on the warm satin of her forearm. The beast in him leaped to the front. He sprang up, coarse mouth open, eyes crimsoning, his clutching hands apart.

"Sit down," she said, and her voice rang like the crack of a trainer's whip. "If ye would win me ye must woo me. Sit down!"

His half-befuddled brain obeyed the dominance of her will and he crouched rather than sat, as an unwilling brute going through a disliked performance.

She had said "if." Would she come willingly to him? Would she play an obedient, eager beauty to his beast? If only she would take her eyes off his. She might be human, but those eyes were not. They made him blink as they had made Pugh blink. Yet she had preferred him to Pugh. Why not? He was the better man for all his ravaged face. Some day. . . .

"Ye are a brave man," she was saying. "Ye have done brave things and ye will do braver, with my aid. Come, ye were going to tell me about this ring."

There may have been some subtle herb steeped in the *caña*. The negress, voodoo-worshiper, who had so ably backed her mistress by her startling apparition, her sooty face smeared with match-phosphorus, fireflies in her wool, a harmless snake looped in the kinks, knew many secrets.

It was not the first time she had raised a devil to her mistress' conjuring, using such simple but not necessarily transparent means as in the present case when she had lit the lamps and swung the door at sight of Margaret's approach backed by a sailor-gaited man. Then, descending through the cellar-trap, kept covered by a grass rug, she had emerged by the outer hatch to play her demoniac rôle and set a prop against the entrance door as she and her mistress had planned for such emergency.

And it was small wonder that, with the setting, the suggestion and eery atmosphere that environed Margaret, the quartermaster, knowing nothing of the existence of her sooty slave, had deemed the apparition supernatural.

Perhaps Margaret Graeme's stress of will gave her hypnotic power. The quartermaster gazed upon the dull emerald and the twinkling eyes of the golden snake and felt his own will melting into a desire to serve. If she was Circe, he was Calibân.

He had meant to lie about the ring, to spin some yarn redounding to his own prowess, but his words came aside from his own volition and he spoke the truth.

"There were three of them left, all brothers," he said. "We chased them all day, thinking them a gold-ship from the Plate, for there was one due in that neighborhood. The schooner was fast. We overhauled it at sunset and we sank it. We killed all the crew, for'ard and amidships, with a round of partridge. The *Three Brothers* it was called. Their name was Graeme.

"We brought them aboard in the longboat. I bound the youngest of them and I took this ring from his finger as I made it fast. One was bald and he mocked Pugh, who sent us ashore with them. We left them with a keg of salt-horse and an anker of brandy. 'Pugh's provender,' we call it. They are dead now and you have the ring."

"Where did ye land them. Where?"

"Nay, I know not. I told ye we chased them all day. We took no sun that noon. Nor did I check our bearings in the log for Pugh and I were at outs and I bunked for'ard for a week before. And since. Somewhere to the southeast of the Wind'ard Isles."

THE HAD told all he knew. In the longboat he had not heard Pugh mention the four men set ashore at a time when he himself had been ashore at Skull Cay, their own headquarters, recovering from fever and a bad shot-wound. Nor did Pugh himself know that Turtler Tom had found the shriveled men and styled the islet Quatros Hombres.

Margaret repressed a sigh. She was balked of the pith of what she sought even while she heard what caused her heart to leap. For Will was still alive—she was strangely confident of that. He had been on a barren cay for eight weeks, nearly nine, for the quartermaster had said Sunday, and the babe was born on Thursday night. Nine weeks with the food that was an aggravation rather than sustaining, the rains had not yet come though they were overdue, but she was sure that her Will, her gallant, strong, loving Will, would win through. As her love had made her do wonders so his would help him to a miraculous preservation. Then there were John, the canny, and Alec, the capable. Oh, it was impossible to think of them perishing!

So now she bent her wits to locating the cay. "Somewhere southeast of the

Windward Islands" was like saying "somewhere in the haystack lies the needle." There were hundreds of cays—no man yet knew how many cays, since the charts were acknowledged vague—humping themselves above the waves, just awash, arid isles of the ocean desert.

But Pugh knew. And Pugh must tell. Pugh would be more difficult. He was not as plastic as his quartermaster, quicker-witted, more—due to his imagination—of a beast when aroused. Margaret swiftly made up her mind to ply the quartermaster of all he knew of Pugh, his rendezvous, his habits, his next intentions. This she would take to the king's ship—there was one expected soon at Providence, and she would make her bargain. News of how to capture Pugh in exchange for information to be dragged from the pirate as to the whereabouts of the cay on which he had set the Graemes. She might go farther and ask for passage on the king's ship.

Yet this course—and she reasoned so swiftly that the quartermaster knew naught of her mental process—was uncertain. Pugh might be killed in the fight. And the *Scourge* had outsailed many a king's ship. She must have two strings to her bow. The quartermaster was her surest method. Later would come the ultimate revenge if aught really happened to her Will.

While the shuttle of her mind shot nimbly through the warp and woof of her brain, weaving in bright strands of hope, the land-wind swept down from the hills in a sudden rush, bringing with it the swift patter of rain. Her heart leaped. It was a sign—a sign that before many hours the season's fall would be mercifully drenching that scorched cay where Will fought off death.

She turned to the quartermaster.

"It is a pretty ring," she said. "I am sorry it has no stranger history or that we do not know it. Thank you."

"Thank me not. Thank Pugh, or, rather, thank no one. You paid for it with your dancing. God, it was like the swaying of the seaweed in the lagoon pools when the tide shifts and all the colored fish swim in and out. And that last. It was a flame! See, I forgot the gold they gave ye."

He took up the tambourine with its jingling coins from the table.

"I need it not," she said. "Take it. Ye can use it."

Open-mouthed, he goggled at her insistence, then pouched the gold.

"Ye care not for money?" he said incredulously.

"Not for coins. They pass through a thousand hands a hundred times a year. They are counters in the game. I like jewels. I love jewels!"

She sighed, and looked at him with deliberate languishment.

"I have seen rare ones, aye, and owned them," he boasted. "I will get ye jewels that have adorned princesses, jewels from sacred shrines, jewels from the hilts of chieftain's swords. I will outweigh thee with jewels. Why, look ye, once——"

"Go on," she said. "Tell me of yourself, brave man."

There is no flattery so subtle as that of Desdemona's gift. All the world loves a ready listener, and the quartermaster talked until his own experience, his own limited invention, and what he remembered of the yarns of others were combined in his Ulyssean tale. Ever and anon the wind would rise to a gale with spit and slap of rain that passed unnoticed by the teller. At last he paused and emptied the mug she had kept replenished.

"I knew you for an adventurous man and a brave one, Simon Hart," she said, for he had told her his name. "You have told me your past. Give me your hand. I will read ye the future."

Then from his horny palm she conjured a vision of success, tinged with suggestions to her own end that so accorded with Simon Hart's self-estimation that it knit his will to achieve these things. She read and leavened his jealousy of Pugh, of any master, she cajoled him and held out hints of reward until he swore by all the gods of sea and land that she was a marvel and that he would prove her so.

"The men are with me," he boasted. "Pugh is puffed up with pride and has forgot his fellowship. They are tired of seeing him with the lion's share and, with their smaller measure, only harsh words. He would forbid them the freedom of the cabin, he would curb their shore liberty, he calls no conferences, he gives only half an ear to what I set before him.

"The wind blows my way now. And when we have given him the black spot, when he is deposed and I rule and reap a harvest of the Caribbean, wilt come with me to Skull Cay and queen it? I will build you a house and bring you *mustee* slaves, white slaves and black, and I will be the chiefest of them. I will make Pugh your servant. I will humble him as I will elevate thee. Wilt come?"

"Come back to me soon and tell me ye have done these things. We will reap the harvest later. Prove to me you are a better man than Pugh. Bring him to me or me to him——"

"What want ye of Pugh?" he asked with sudden suspicion.

"I hate him. He tried to kiss my lips. He would have taken me by force. I could have killed him but I would rather see you break him and then give him to me. See, the lamps are wan. The day breaks."

Simon Hart leaped to his feet and looked through the rain-streaked window at the graying east.

"We sail on the flood," he said. "Pugh would go without me. Farewell!"

He would have embraced her roughly, but she eluded him, and a hint of struggling rose stained the sky above the hills and flushed the room.

"Farewell," he cried again and left the cabin, running heavily across the clearing. Margaret watched him with eyes from which the glaze of fever had lifted to show exaltation struggling with weariness and saw him plunge into the bush path with a hasty wave to her. Then she turned back into the cabin and leaned above the small bundle on the bed behind the screen.

"Babe, babe," she breathed softly. "Your father, whom ye have never seen and who has never seen your little straight limbs and his own image in your eyes and shape, is coming home again."

And the pattering, saving rains told the beads of her prayers.

When the great negress came softly in she found Margaret Graeme asleep on her knees beside the bed, continuing her grateful petitions in her dreams.

## CHAPTER V

### FOX AND HOUNDS

FOR the third time the *Scourge*, with mutiny mounting in the hearts of her crew, headed up for Skull Cay, Pugh's rendezvous in the delta of the River Plate. For the third time the chagrined lookout in the top saw through his glass the king's ship in the offing, visible to him by her higher spars and canvas. Behind them, outdistanced for the time, more by luck than speed, for the *Scourge's* bottom was fast gathering a drag of weed, Pugh knew the *Thetis*, sloop-of-war, was following relentlessly.

Somewhere below the sea rim her consort was cruising. And they were all after the *Scourge*. The hunt for Pugh was on, and these three indomitable, untiring gazehounds of the sea had viewed him and never had one of them, or two, failed to loom on the horizon at nightfall and again at dawn.

Once, after a gale that blotted sea and sky, a frigate had shown so close to them in the swift clearance that the bullies of the *Scourge* could see from their deck the yellow hull with its blue top-works and the scarlet gun-ports that opened eagerly to belch a broadside that came skipping and scattering across the waves. Pugh had run for it, outmetaled by this frigate of the fourth-class but not outsailed. Then the sloop-of-war had appeared, heading them off, and Pugh and his bullies fought a smashing encounter.

The sloop had them inshore and the frigate was plowing along far astern, so that there was nothing for Pugh to do but run the gantlet of the sloop's broadside until he could forge ahead on his superior speed. This the *Scourge* had finally accomplished, but not until showering roundshot had taken toll of the crew and damaged the gear so that Pugh had to fish his foretopmast. Five bullies went overboard to the ground sharks, seven still tossed and groaned in the stuffy cock-pit, their jagged wounds attended by the leech with the rough surgery of those times.

Their best suit of sails had been sadly rent by the iron hail and they had been given no time to patch, only to change foresail and two of the jibs for extra canvas, well worn and none too sound. Altogether they were in evil case. Their bottom was fouling rapidly so that already they could note the difference of speed and answer to the helm. Their water was low and beginning to smell musty. Worst of all, the powder was running short.

They had made but a brief stay at Porto Bello on account of the tip given Pugh by the tavern-keeper concerning the goldship and they had been unable to buy munitions there. They had missed the gold-ship, or the tip had been false, the men were tired and lacked sleep, the grog was none too plentiful and Simon Hart assiduously encouraged the idea that it was all the fault of Pugh, that the captain's luck had gone, that he had had his day and that the passing of the "black spot" was in order. Such whisperings went about without any knowing who started them.

Pugh sensed the trouble, sensed too that the quartermaster was the brewer and cursed the day that he had taken among his crew a man who knew navigation. So far the common peril kept the snake of rebellion coiled and only sleepily resentful. Once out of it, Pugh determined that Simon Hart must die, in such fashion that the crew should not suspect Pugh of the deed. And Hart read the wish and the will in Pugh's demeanor so that the two went warily, watching each the other.

It was the continuous presence of one or other of the king's ships in the Plata Gulf that gave Pugh greatest uneasiness. True, he might, at nightfall, slip into one of the many mouths of the Plate and work his way through the labyrinth of creeks, but it was vital to refit and careen and to reach the stores and powder in the magazines at Skull Cay, but it seemed evident that the enemy knew of the existence and location of that rendezvous.

Some one had blabbed, Pugh knew not whom. There were moments when Simon Hart wondered if the dancing witch had played him false, but he could see no reason for such vindictiveness toward himself and her hate of Pugh he set down to a woman's whimsy, a flare-up that would die as swiftly as it had flamed. Nor did it curb his ultimate ambition to displace Pugh and see himself as a master buccaneer, a swaggering, colorful figure to be sung of ashore and at sea.

Meanwhile they were in jeopardy. They were closer to the land and to their haven than the frigate, but the *Scourge* lay in a belt of alternate calm and sudden, forceless catspaws that sent the schooner surging forward for a little footage, then died away to leave her with slapping canvas and jerking rigging as she pitched on the groundswell. But the frigate was coming in on a full breeze. All her courses were set and studdingsails had been spread in her captain's eagerness to head off the chase.

On she came, lifting higher and higher until they could see the gleam of her wet side, its airy roll as it lifted, and the creaming rush at her bows. And still the sharp line of the wind, dark against the sluggish shore waters, showed sharp and clear and steady, two miles seaward of the *Scourge*. Presently the frigate ran out of the breeze, her studdingsails hung idle, course after course wrinkled from their bellied fulness and the crew began to take in some of the useless kites. Under her own impetus she glided into the calm belt that girdled the schooner and lay there heaving to the swell.

Pugh looked at the distant land and at the haze that hid the crests of the range. He looked at the sky that was a blue flame and he looked at the sea about him, a sea of greenish brass. He looked at his crew and at Simon Hart and gritted his teeth as he walked his quarterdeck.

"May their souls crisp in hell!" he muttered, and the oath included king's men and his own.

He was trapped. He had less than thirty able men and presently boats would drop over from the king's ship, filled with fighting men, two at least to his one, and they would come swinging over the swell with the bosun's pipe of "boarders away" still ringing in their ears. His men, if they could be called his, would fight hard and well, but there would be no spirit in them, only the sullen, desperate courage of the cornered pirate while the king's men would swarm over and through the nettings with cheers.

He leveled his glass. Already tiny figures were swarming at the davits of the frigate. Pugh snapped the telescope shut.

"Lay aft here, all hands," he roared. "Men, we're in a tight box. See to it they don't nail the lid down on us. The devil's own luck is in the weather, and, hear me all, I'll serve a mass to Satan an he'll but send us enough wind to slide by that frigate! We've got to beat off their boarding-party. So up double-nettings and fight like the devil's own. Gunner, I'll lay Long Tom myself. Double-shot your carronades. Use partridge and canister. Lively, all of ye, or ye'll be squirming on hell's griddles in an hour."

Pugh went forward and saw to the loading of his long bow-chaser, one hand fondly on the sleek metal skin of his barking serpent while he hung over the breech, watching the foremost boat from the frigate as it came up on the long surges of the ground-swells and hung on the crests for a moment, the oars of the men dipping in rhythmic man-of-war sweep, making the four craft that had been dispatched against them look like water beetles, straddling on top of, rather than in, the water.

LITTLE specks of white light broke out from the weapons of the fighters, soon the pirates could see the gay colors of the uniforms, the figures of the officers in the stern sheets, urging their rowers on in the gallant race for the honor of being first aboard the chase. They could see the spurts of foam from the quick, even catch of the ash blades, working with toy-like precision. The little flotilla split apart, they were going to attack on both sides.

The pirates worked like fiends, raising a double-net above the rail, piling up their ammunition, setting handy pike and double-ax and pistol and musket. Many were armed with Pugh's special boarding pistols, he himself carried a variety of small arms in his belt and slung from a sash that ran across his bare and matted chest.

Every man was nude to the waist, belts were taut and kerchiefs wrapped tight about their brows and each man's face was grim for the encounter. Swabs stood beside the inhauls of the carronades and buckets of water ready to cool the heated metal. By the foremast they were taking turns at a grindstone, edging their cutlases afresh and the sparks shone orange in the sun before they died.

And still Pugh waited, calculating the range and the lift of the water before he fired. He was the master-gunner of them all, and their only hope lay in smashing at least one boat, no easy mark as it raced on. The leading cutter poised on the rounded summit of a swell and Pugh, squinting through the sight, dipped the glowing linstock to the powdered touch-hole. The Long-Tom roared and white smoke cauliflowered up from the muzzle in the still air. Pugh, peering through the screen, saw the shot souse into the sea beside the boat, shearing off the blades of the port oars and throwing the crew into temporary confusion.

"Jump to it, —— ye, jump!" he yelled, lending his strength to the inhaul of the gun, seizing the swab himself and plying it dexterously.

The charge was set and rammed home with almost incredible swiftness and Pugh's hawk eyes fiercely sighted the mark. The missile plumped fairly into the cutter, fragments flew and the sea was dotted with the black forms of struggling men, survivors of the deadly aim.

The second boat swung in to the rescue and Pugh laughed.

"A taste of our metal they didn't relish," he crowed. "We'll try 'em again."

But his next shot ricocheted harmlessly past the target and a puff of white smoke from the bows of the frigate, followed by a hollow boom, sounded the recall.

"Done! They're done, the snivelling hounds!" cried Pugh.

"No, by God, the wind is coming!" He had seen the flattened royals and skysails on the distant frigate puff and fall to puff again while a line of foam showed faint at her bows. The boats had turned with the men they had rescued from the wreck of the cutter and were speeding back. Twice more the Long-Tom roared without a hit.

Seaward the sky had suddenly darkened, wind pouring out of gathering clouds as from a bellows, the swift riffle of it all about the frigate now and reaching toward the *Scourge*. The king's men had to get aboard, which equalized to some extent the fact that the schooner was last to get the breeze. A fine haze had veiled the sky and tarnished the sun, a moan came out of the source of the wind, a hurricane was forward. It was not a Plate *pampero*, but a true sea-gale.

"A black mass to thee, Satan!" shouted Pugh. "We'll beat 'em yet!"

The sudden unleashed gale grew in intensity. Aboard the frigate they were shortening sail as she rushed on toward the *Scourge*. But now the schooner had caught the breeze and was fleeing northward, the wind abeam, the sweet lines of her entry slicing the long rollers that had replaced the heave of the swell. The heavier frigate heeled, her bows deep to the catheads, her masts abend. A faint sound, like a pistol shot, came to the *Scourge* and an unfurled royal flew from the frigate like a bird. Yet her superior canvas, while it held, smashed her through the seas faster than the

*Scourge*, which trailed a beard of weed along her keel, and she held the windward gage.

The frigate did not fire. The distance was still extreme for her range and the pitch and toss of chaser and chased made targetry a waste of powder. But her canvas held in the bolt-ropes, the lighter sails having been furled before the full fury of the gale broke, and she gained, little by little. A drenching area of rain from an overswollen cloud passed between the two ships, hurrying to gain the shore with the remnants of its load and for a minute or so blotted out all view.

Following it came a gusty squall and the wounded topmast of the *Scourge* smashed at the cross-trees. Still the frigate gained and now a long headland loomed up, barring the way. The schooner could not clear it, but Pugh held on to his tack until the last moment before he ordered—

"'Bout ship!"

The pirates hauled madly on the sheets as the *Scourge* spun on her keel and clawed a frantic way seaward into the face of the gale with the king's ship, plunging like a bull, coming fast up. As the schooner crossed her bows the frigate yawed and fire spurted from her dripping sides. Round shot screeched through the rigging above the voice of the storm, round shot gouged the *Scourge's* planks and tore away her rail, round shot slugged into her side-planks as she rose to the roll of the sea. Peak and throat halyards of the mainsail were torn away as the blocks came smashing down, the canvas drooped like the broken wing of a bird and the schooner fell off in the trough.

Two men swarmed aloft with repair tackle, but as she rose to the pitch of the great waves another volley came and men dropped groaning while Pugh cursed at their impotence.

"Satan take me, but send rain," he bawled as he stood at the wheel astride the headless helmsman who had fallen at his feet in the last discharge.

Above them an ebon cloud was rived with lightning, and from the gash a blinding torrent fell, hiding sea and sky, battering the deck and hissing in the scuppers, striving to flatten the rearing waves that ran and leaped uncontrolled as the hurricane reached its height.

The mainsail, reefed close, rose again, and the stricken schooner gained headway. Pugh could not see the frigate for the storm and darkness, but he knew she too must have tacked to avoid the cape and was now using every effort to combat the gale. Out to sea they fought, foot by foot, under the inky pall of the sky, while the thunder pealed and the rain thudded down. Once only as a blue javelin split the clouds from the zenith did Pugh catch a glimpse of the laboring frigate.

Hour after hour they beat out until they had struggled through to the skirts of the tempest, and at sunset sailed a troubled but subsiding sea without sail in sight or fall of land.

## CHAPTER VI

### REPRISAL

AT MIDNIGHT Pugh sat alone in his cabin. Neither his lieutenant, Folsom, the leech, nor Simon Hart, who slept in tiny cubbyholes that opened from the main cabin, had come aft since they had run out of the storm. All three were forward with the men, and though Pugh had closed transom and door against the sound, he was conscious of snatches of song and drunken shouting in the bows.

For the first time he had lost control of his men. They had refused to clean ship after they had run out of the gale, and Pugh, swallowing his black wrath, had let the matter go under Simon Hart's smiling excuse that the hands were dog-tired.

It presaged trouble; Pugh realized that very plainly. He was not the man to brook tamely the taking away of his authority and a place forward among the hands with his share the same as the least among them. He could hardly believe that he had dropped the whip and lost the power over his bullies. They were all brainless—save Simon Hart. Left to themselves they knew naught but to drink, sing or listen to bragging, evil yarns. They never thought. A story-spinner could hold them, any one with initiative could get an audience, the last thought placed in their heads was the prime one, and Simon Hart, the crafty devil, had worked upon them as a modeler would handle clay until they were all of his pattern. With Hart out of the way, he, Pugh, could bring them 'round again.

And he walked the cabin pondering the best way of disposing of Simon Hart. He might challenge him or start a quarrel?

The medico came down the companionway and sank down unbidden on a chair at the table beneath the gimbaled lamp. His face was drawn and his tired eyes were set in black caverns.

"'Ranting Dick' has gone," he said. "Bates and Willett will go out with the dawn. I may pull Ames through, but he'll lack a leg. And Bartlet is in evil case."

Pugh scowled. Of all the crew Bates and Ranting Dick might have been depended upon to stand with him against the rest.

"Stop your croaking," he said angrily, then changed his note. "Nay Folsom, I meant it not. Ye need somewhat to bring back your own blood. Art white as a corpse. Mix yourself a rummer of grog. Mix one for me."

The leech looked craftily at Pugh as he mixed gin, water and the juice of limes with sugar into a cold toddy. There was malice in his eyes.

"There's trouble for'ard," he essayed tentatively, and as Pugh did not forbid him, went on.

"The men say that Pugh's luck has broken, that ye have given your soul to Satan and that ye are accursed. They have held a council and they have voted to slip ye the spot."

He squealed suddenly like a rabbit when it feels the fetters bite, and his glass fell from his palsied hands as Pugh clutched him about the throat and shook him clear of the floor.

"So, they will slip me the spot, will they? And they have sent ye sneaking aft to deliver it. You dog, you drug-pounding, treacherous dog. Ye dare to come to me and tell me I am to be deposed!"

He flung the doctor from him with a crash and the leech landed in a huddle upon his hands and knees.

"Nay, I bring nothing. I—I voted against it. I came to warn ye. They will slip ye the spot in the morning. I tell ye some wanted to see ye walk the plank but I would none of it."

"Aye, ye persuaded Simon Hart to mercy, I doubt not," said Pugh grimly. "Get up, man, and finish your grog. Mix more. Now listen. Where are your drugs? In Hart's cabin?"

"Yes."

"Have ye enough to mix a sleeping draft for the quartermaster, have ye enough to mix one so deep for Hart that he will wake up in hell? Listen, Folsom, do this for me and we will win through yet. We'll slip through this cordon, we'll repair ship and sneak back to Porto Bello or some other port and refit. We'll get more bullies to replace our dead and you, Folsom, shall be my right-hand man. A double share for ye in all. We'll set up another rendezvous and ye shall have a house there of your own, a house for your loot and your women. What say ye?

"It must be a cunning drug or that devil Hart will note it in his liquor. And one that acts swiftly. With him down I will drive the rest of them until they beg for me to forgive them. Have ye such a drug, Folsom? Look ye," he clapped the leech upon the back. "I have gold and jewels here aboard the *Scourge*. I'll share the gold with ye and give ye the pick of the jewels. Gems to win a woman's favor with, Folsom, gold to buy it."

"Where is it?" asked Folsom, still with the malice cold in his eyes, though now it was tinged with greed.

"There is a false bottom to the locker in my room cabin below floor-level. Slip for'ard and take the drug, put it in Hart's drink and then come back to me. Art game for it?"

The leech nodded and pushed Pugh's second toddy toward him.

"Ye'll pledge me your word?" he asked.

Pugh picked up the rummer and gulped down its contents.

"I'll play fair with ye," he said.

Suddenly his face contracted, his mouth drew back in a snarl, and he set an uncertain hand to his head, looking at Folsom through a thickening haze. His voice came in a husky growl that choked in his dry throat as his staring eyes began to glaze.

"Double-dealing knave, I'll ——"

He lurched heavily against the table and groaned as Folsom watched him with fascinated gaze. Then Pugh squared himself with a mighty effort and stood erect, a dirk in his hand.

"Drug me, would ye? I'll slit thy weasand!"

Folsom made a sudden dive for the companionway, but Pugh towered between him and escape. With the dose that the leech had mixed in the second toddy it seemed incredible that the pirate chief could keep his senses. He dodged behind the table and Pugh came toward him with a certain grim dexterity, wedging him in a corner of the main cabin behind the table and reaching for him, his head nodding as if with the palsy, dry lips apart, eyes protruding with the effort of the will back of them.

Pugh's fingers closed, twisting the medico's cravat, and dragged him across the table, turning him on his back, wind and speech cut off, weak and limp from semi-suffocation, gaze goggling at the blade that descended in inexorable jerks that marked the failing coordinations of Pugh's mind and body, descended until its sharp edge broke the skin and gashed flesh and windpipe while the air from Folsom's lungs rushed whistling out with his escaping soul, his half-severed head fell back across the table's edge, and Pugh, groping toward the sealed companionway, bolted and barred it before he slumped and lay inert.

PUGH came back to consciousness with a frightful, pounding pain in his head, a searing almost unendurable torment. His mouth was foul and dry, when, with an effort, he opened his gummy eyes the vertical rays of the sun glared into them and added torture to the pulsating agony of his brain.

He was lying in the bottom of a small boat, his bulk wedged and crumpled between the thwarts. The boat floated on even keel in a dead calm. There were little sucking noises at the bow that sounded to him like drum-strokes. Along the thwarts lay a mast with its sail wrapped about it, together with two oars. In the stern were two kegs and a baling pannikin.

Pugh managed to get one arm across his face to shade the furnace of the sun. Slowly recollection came back to him in disjointed fragments as it had registered. He remembered the drugging and the killing of Folsom—that was a deed well deserved and well done—then the breaking of the skylight, the battering down of a door, with himself rising and fighting like a man in his sleep. He remembered the taunting face of Simon Hart, then he had fired at it and missed, but had hit some one, for a face back of Hart had changed from a triumphant grin to a mask of pain. Some one had struck him on the head from behind—and that had been the end.

And they had not killed him. Why? He lifted his head and exquisite agony spread from a spot above his right ear until it surged like a white flame through his consciousness. The blow must have laid bare his brain. He feared to touch the place. It seemed to him he would feel the pulsing matter oozing at the contact. As an egg when the shell is broken but the membrane holds intact and dimly shows the yolk. That was how his head must be and the sun was frying his brains! Yet he could use them. He was still alive! It was the remnant of the cursed drug that bound him. Presently he would get up, make an effort, plan the future.

He lapsed again. When he revived he lay in shadow. The sky was a bowl of jade above him and the boat was moving, tossing to one side and another unevenly as if in the jobble of a tide-rip. The pain in his brain was less, the vitality seemed to have come back to him somewhat, though he was terribly cramped and terribly weak, so that the best he could do was to crawl and twist himself to a huddle in the stern close to the two kegs.

There was no wind, no tide-rip, no motion on the placid sea of peacock-blue.

Blunt muzzles reared above the surface, gray forms rubbed against the planks like great cats that arch and scrape their backs while waiting to be fed. The boat swayed and swerved as the sharks forged under the keel and lifted it. There were two score of them or more, silently, persistently striving to upset the thing that kept from them the food they sensed and craved.

It was cooler. It had rained yesterday, tomorrow it would likely rain again, since the rains were fairly started. But meantime, with his partial revival, there came a craving for food and water, principally for water. Pugh knew what was in the kegs beside him before he made certain of it. They had given him "Pugh's Provender," the same brandy and salt-meat he had devised for those he had marooned. If he could only strike land somewhere and find puddles and pools of yesterday's downpour. He seemed partly paralyzed from the drug, and he hitched himself up with elbows and hands to a higher position.

Far to the south he thought he glimpsed the blue phantom of a sail. That would be the *Scourge*. There must have been a breeze when they had put him overboard. Pugh prayed that one of the king's ships might come up and demolish the schooner and hang Simon Hart to the yardarm, kicking and jerking like an impaled crab.

The sun dropped and evening swiftly fled before night. Pugh could no longer quite control his mind. He was still afraid to touch the wound he had received. It must have been from belaying pin or marlinspike, he thought, and he held the belief that only a thin integument lay between his brain and the air. Once let that be pierced and he would die.

All night gray sharks trailed with the boat, muzzling, nudging each other in a ghastly cortège. Sooner or later what was in the boat would come to them. Sooner—or later. Once Pugh thought he heard the boom of guns across the watery sounding-board, but he could not be sure.

Soon after that he began to see shapes, seated on thwart and gunwales, some with their dried arms folded and their desiccated bodies in the water. There were others who grinned at him from the bows. Folsom, the leech, with his severed throat, and Simon Hart! Good—if that was Simon's ghost Simon was dead and he, Pugh, was still alive, very weak, but alive! And therefore still the better man.

The shapes were those of men and women. Vaguely he remembered some of them. He had marooned them. There was one phantom of a girl with great black eyes. She had died by her own hand—after. . . . And there were the four men he had left on the cay. He had left three there just recently. Where were they? Ah, there—there on the next thwart! One was bald-headed. Priest-face he had called him.

The boat began to slide along in the grip of some mysterious current, for there was no breeze, no veil in the sky to herald rain. Water! There it was, a hidden stream running underneath the keel. And he too weak to dig for it. Once he had seen a man with divining rods. . . .

Dawn rushed up and the phantoms disappeared. The boat rocked. The gray shapes were breaking water now. Pugh essayed to pick up an oar and batted feebly at the snouts that showed. The boat swerved. They were trying to capsize it. The boat moved on, grounded and now the blood-beat in his brain grew louder. It was surf breaking on low land. Pugh craned his head painfully. He was being carried fast by flood and current to a sandy beach dotted with gray shrubs.

Land! And somewhere in some rock crevice there must be water. The boat bumped, dragged, lifted and bumped on again. A swell tilted the stern and swept the boat on to strand it on the shore. The gray shapes were cheated, left behind in deeper water. He was ashore.

Somehow he got out and collapsed on the wet sand. Then some vital spark brightened and he began to crawl mechanically up the slope. There were no rocks about that his bleary eyes could see, but there were marks that showed that turtles had been there. How fresh the trail he could not tell. He could no longer reason, his moves were instinctive. Some low mounds loomed ahead. They should be where the turtles had covered their eggs. He clawed with painful effort and unearthed a grinning skull.

He tried to scramble from the place and bones grasped at him from the loosened sand. With a prodigious effort he got to his knees and so to tottering feet. Out of the palmetto scrub three grisly figures came toward him, ragged, thin—one of them had a bald head. The others. . . .

Pugh turned and lurched down the slope. He was blind and dizzy, his brain afire. He could not see his boat, and staggered on with outspread arms, pursued by the phantoms. He heard the lap of water. It was the old swimming-pool! He would dive and escape. There was a gap behind an old root. Waist-deep he splashed into the lagoon, scooping up the salt sea and thinking it nectar. Then he struck the verge of a tide-swept gulf and plunged forward.

A gray shape, followed swiftly by another and yet another, rose, swirled and lunged. There was a commotion under the surface that sent long ripples diverging on the top, ripples stained with crimson that rapidly dissolved to streamers of pink.

"'TWAS Pugh himself!" cried Alec Graeme. "The sharks have got him!"

"He has left his boat," said Will Graeme hoarsely. "He has left his boat! See, there are mast and sail. Come Alec, come

John. We've won through. Margaret!"

He fell to his knees on the sand in thankfulness, and his brothers dragged up the boat.

"We'll broach the kegs and clean them," said Alec. "It is clouding for rain. With these and the two others filled with water we can essay the trip."

Will Graeme came up.

"We start now," he said fiercely.

Alec set an arm about his shoulders.

"Tonight, lad," he said. "'Tis an uncertain trip. Pray God there be stars to set our course."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE END OF THE CHASE

IN THE gray of the dawn Captain Thorne of his Majesty's sloop-of-war *Thetis* chuckled as he picked up the pirate schooner that he had fought at long range as they drifted through the starlit, almost breezeless night. Now the wind strengthened with the dawn, the canvas filled and they bore down upon the *Scourge*.

It was the end of the long chase. The schooner sailed but sluggishly compared with the sloop, and while her stern-chaser fired intermittently, the aim was bad and the shot fell short.

"They are saving on the charges. Powder's low," he said to his lieutenant. "We've got them now, Blair."

The woman standing by the rail moved over to him. Her sleepless eyes were brilliant. Captain Thorne nodded to her.

"We'll have them inside of an hour, Mrs. Graeme," he said kindly. "Thanks, in great measure to you."

"Pugh must know the island where he left them. You'll get it from him, Captain."

"Aye, we'll persuade him to tell all he knows." As she moved back to the rail where she had watched ever since the first shot had been fired Thorne added in an undertone to his junior. "If we get him alive. We'll keep bargain with her and seek the island, but they can hardly be alive for all her faith. Look—look at their flag! They are surrendering."

The black flag of the pirate was fluttering down its halyards. Then it stopped and through his glass Captain Thorne noted a commotion on her decks. A figure broke from a mob of men and fled down a hatchway. But the flag came on down to the deck.

"Cease firing!" ordered Thorne.

Suddenly the schooner seemed to split apart as a gush of black smoke rushed up from her amidships. A dull roar came over the water and the smoke spread above a flash of red while fragments of spars fell slowly. There was a momentary vision of the stern and bow of the schooner plunging beneath the waves and then, as the smoke drifted off before the wind, a few blackened scraps of floating timber, a struggling speck or two that vanished and the career of the *Scourge* was ended. Simon Hart, cheating the gallows, had broken through his spirit-crushed men and fired the remnants of the magazine.

Margaret Graeme, pale-faced, gazed horror-struck at the spot where the *Scourge* had vanished. Now the last hope of finding Will was surely gone. Slowly, with hanging head, she went below to the cabin Thorne had assigned her, where the negress sat with the babe.

She was still there, sick, despairing, when a cry came from the mast-head.

Hardly discernible, a black dot showed against the salmon of the sunset sky. The *Thetis* shifted course and soon the dot became a boat making steady headway to the northwest under a lug sail. Closer and closer the sloop came toward the tiny craft until all aboard could see three men in the stern and then a waving cloth.

"Mrs. Graeme, a miracle has happened," said Captain Thorne. "Your husband and his brothers are alongside."

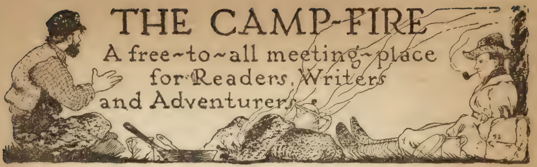
Margaret rose with shining eyes.

"An answer to prayer is not a miracle, Captain Thorne," she said. And, with her babe in her arms, she went on deck.

"There must have been a hurricane somewhere," said Alec Graeme, "the kind that comes before the rains arrive. Probably it destroyed the growth on some isle, and it's to be hoped there were none living on it, but the drift brought the uprooted palms to us and scattered five of them along the beach. Two more we got by wading off the point. Seven in all, close to two hundred nuts, with nigh to half a pint of life-saving liquor in each of them. That saved us. Sheer luck, I call it."

"Plus sheer pluck," said Captain Thorne.

But Margaret Graeme, safe in her husband's wasted arms, knew otherwise.



# THE CAMP-FIRE

## A free-to-all meeting-place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

DO YOU remember that several years ago we suggested naming regiments instead of numbering them, or in addition to numbering them? The idea is sound. Since we've enlarged our Army, regiments and divisions have frequently been given names. It makes for *esprit de corps*. Also it is a natural human impulse.

One of you who took up the idea was C. S. Edmiston of Quitman, Mississippi, who suggested a regiment of musicians. But he did more than that. He went ahead and by his own efforts organized a military band. That band was accepted for service and, when I heard from Mr. Edmiston, was stationed with the 114th Engineer Regiment. He himself was expecting a discharge because of physical disability (his third honorable discharge), but his band remains in service.

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AN INTERESTING word from H. A. Lamb concerning his story in this issue. Mr. Lamb, like several others of our writers' brigade, is still able to furnish us occasional stories though in the Army.

> Alamut is not a creation of the author. It was one of the four castles of the Refik. The latter are more commonly known as the Ismailians, a sect that separated themselves from the other Mohammedans.
>
> A secret empire, wielding murderous power, more powerful than the Knights Templars, the Council of Twelve, or the Ku Klux Klan! The "Old Man of the Mountain" a master of the empire so feared by his subjects that two of them threw themselves from the high walls of a castle at the bidding of a priest in order to impress a foreign envoy! A paradise so devilishly ingenious that the warriors of the Refik threw away their lives readily in order to return, as they supposed, to the joys of the Ismailian paradise!
>
> THESE were startling particulars, even for the adventurous times of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They proved, however, to be history and not legend. The dynasty of the Assassins, as the rulers of Alamut were called, holds its place among the kings of Persia. The Old Man of the Mountains, who should more correctly be called the Sheikh of the Mountains, was known to travelers and historians from Marco Polo to Mirkhond. As to the paradise, it is not known whether its power for evil lay in the effects of the drug hashish or in an actual scene of splendor and license.
>
> The power of the Assassins was broken by Hulagu Khan and his Tatars some two hundred and fifty years before the time of Khlit, but nests of the Ismailians survived until the end of the eighteenth century, and as a religious sect the Ismailians number many followers today—deprived, of course, of the secret terror of their ancient daggers.

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ANY one who can tell just what our Camp-Fire is is wiser than I. On the face of things it is merely an indefinite something on paper only. Certainly there is no definite organization of any kind—no officers, no constitution or by-laws, no fees or dues. A few unwritten rules but no formalities of any kind. Any one belongs who wishes to and he doesn't need any help in joining.

Our Camp-Fire's general object is an indefinite kind of good-fellowship and it pretends to nothing except being the means of swapping interesting experiences. Of course our "Lost Trails," "Ask Adventure" and other free services are practical helps, but in each of them the magazine is a necessary factor. Our magazine avowedly tries to help its readers when it can, but the thing that always leaves me in doubt is the relationship among the Camp-Fire members themselves. Theoretically they are under no obligations to each other. Theoretically they only read or write the letters we have in our department of the magazine. Theoretically they are acquainted only on paper.

But the *facts* of the case? The facts knock the theories sky-high. Again and again and again I learn, here at this clearing-house desk, of real friendships created by our Camp-Fire. I am the richer by quite a number of them myself. And here is a letter from one of you which speaks for itself:

> To show the Camp-Fire what its members are like I wish you would print this letter, without names or identity, of course. Just say a Camp-Fire-ist had his shack burgled and gutted, and got this letter from another Camp-Firer. I only wish it was good form to tell who he was. Of course, I didn't need the help, but oh, man! *What* a man he is to so offer! Any lodge would ask me "Are your dues paid up?" but he—I haven't the words to tell what he is. That is the old-time West exemplified in him.
>
> The last sentence in his letter refers to three notches in the butt of my .45 that he noticed but was too tactful to ask about.

Following is the letter he enclosed and asked to have returned to him. The two men never heard of each other until they got acquainted through our Camp-Fire.

> I am coming at you head on, square as a brick, with no evasion or dodging the issue. You would take me in and feed me and sleep me and divide your tobacco with me if I came along broke and down on my luck. Now you give your friends the same privilege.
>
> SEND me a list of what you need most, with sizes, descriptions, etc., and send it at once. I'll be teetotally jumped up if I am going to have you left in such a plight. I have been studying how to help in some way that would not hurt your feelings and I have given up the struggle, believing that the best way is to come at you like one man meeting another. You and I are no women to hem and haw over things. If we were trapping in partnership or prospecting the same way, what one had both would have. It don't make a —— bit of difference if I am here in an upper room and you out there. We have got to look at this thing as though we slept under the same blanket and ate out of the same frying-pan.
>
> What do you need most? If it is underclothing, what sizes? If it is socks too, what size? If it is grub, what would you rather have? I've got a few dollars in my kick and I'm not going to keep it there and have you hungry or cold. Come through, old man, come through!
>
> IF THAT list does not get in here right soon I shall steal some fellow's auto and hike down there to wallop you. I went to the hospital for a big operation once, appendicitis, and had only thirteen dollars to my name and a wife and three children dependent on me. I was glad to have a man slip me a hundred and say, "Pay it when you get well." I took it, of course I did, for it was no worse to grab that than to grab a bit of plank some one hove to me when I was drowning.
>
> Don't act squeamish now. If you had me as a pal and ran out of plug, you would say, "Here, you big stiff, whack up on that plug and when I get more I'll do the same." I won't eat an ounce less or have a mite less on my back for helping you out of a hole.
>
> SO SPILL that list to me *muy pronto*, *amigo*, if you want to remain *amigo*. Underclothes, socks, grub, tobacco, whatever you need. I don't want you to do any funny stunt of letting pride get between us, any more than you would if we had bunked together all over the coast. I know one other man who feels just as I do and who will dig as deep, so you are to tell the truth about your need and quit your danged blushing like a kid girl. 'Taint your fault that —— robbed you.
>
> S'POSE you rode along a road and saw a house burning down and some poor cuss in his shirt-tail beside the road, all his clothes gone in the fire. If you had some extra clothing along I reckon he'd get in them right soon. Well, the dirty ladrones were the fire and you are the victim beside the road. Now don't be dirty mean and refuse help that is offered as freely as you would offer an extra coat in such a case. If you do, well, just count that you have slapped a friend's face, and that without provocation. That list and the sizes, *pronto!*
>
> I shall expect that list by return mail.
>
> I wish I could get hold of that guy you think has your gun. I have a hunch that he would produce it and squeal on the rest before I hit him more than half a dozen times. If I had a car I would have gone right down there as soon as I heard and if I did go there I would sure labor with that cuss by force of arms. Don't you kill anybody unless you can prove self defense.

---

HERE is a letter with some big ideas. The general purpose is the *real* Americanization of naturalized citizens and the prevention of strong alien allegiance among those in this country who are not citizens, a general purpose which I indorse unqualifiedly.

As to barring the teaching of any foreign language in our schools, there must be limitations. If no Americans could speak French, Spanish and other foreign languages it would mean not only an immense commercial, social, literary and scientific loss but an increase in the provincialism that is one of our national weaknesses. Even from a military point of view a nation none of whose people can speak the enemy language is at a decided practical disadvantage, to say nothing of ability to speak the language of foreign allies. My own first impulse was a desire to sweep all foreign languages from our schools, but second thought convinces most of us that the remedy itself would be a calamity.

AND a needless calamity. Only the German language is now a danger. In its case I am for drastic measures. The other languages are a different matter, one that can safely be handled by wise limitations and a more gradual treatment. As a first step we might, for example, bar *all* languages as *compulsory* parts of any school course, forbid the use in schools of any foreign language as the *teaching* language in any subject except that language itself, and, perhaps ban the teaching of any foreign language in primary grades. These merely as suggestions; the subject is far too complicated for settlement in a few brief sentences.

BUT the German language is a case by itself, a case in which the one pressing necessity overrides academic arguments and even consistency in according German the same treatment as other languages. The issue of the war is, at the date this is written, still in doubt, but only a blind fool can deny that up to 1918 military success has been with the enemy. Their success has been due to only four things—(1) military and economic organization and preparedness, (2) unity of command in the hands of trained soldiers, (3) sacrifice of right to might, of humanity and decency to brute efficiency and, at least as important as any of the other reasons, (4) systematic *propaganda* at home and *abroad*.

We have been inclined to view this fourth reason, German propaganda, as bad but not as vital. Yet if you analyze the German success down to its very fundamentals and beginnings you find that systematic propaganda has been their *most important weapon*. It began several generations ago in Germany itself, the systematic, governmental education of the German people into efficient, carefully shaped cogs in the great Hun machine of brute force. The second step was the planting of Germans in other countries, notably Russia, the United States and Latin America, generally as citizens of these countries but always held to Germany and Germany's interests by the invisible steel chains of German propaganda. The third step was the building up among these hospitable peoples of sentiments advantageous to Germany's interests and particularly the fomenting and encouraging of any and all kinds of internal differences and strife among these peoples that would weaken them against the day when Germany would be ready to strike.

THERE was no chance in all this. No luck. No accident. Nothing but a coldly, carefully worked-out definite plan of tremendous size. And the whole sum and substance of that plan, the very heart of it, was Hun propaganda and education. Subtle, delicate, psychological, invisible and almost unsuspected. When sometimes we noticed a silken thread of the great Hun web we failed to realize that it was not silk but steel. Almost no one realized that the little thread was part of a vast, world-choking web of evil Hun ambition.

Even now Americans fail to give this web a hundredth part of its real importance. We are still enmeshed in it, our every effort more or less crippled by its barely visible throttling grip. It is not just a crude matter of spies and property destroyers in our midst. That is merely ordinary enemy activity—mere child's play compared to the less visible instruments, and not half so serious. Spies and bombs produce quick results; these more subtle instruments may not produce results for years or generations, but their results are infinitely more dangerous to us and—more permanent.

It would take years and volumes to specify all the tiny and various means employed, but as a whole they can be quickly gaged by considering the central Hun machine at Berlin that for years and years has been systematically spinning this silk-steel web. Do you know that at Berlin there is a regular and permanent government department officially called "The Bureau of Enemy Psychology"? Stop reading a minute and think what that means.

WE PRIDE ourselves on being a "practical" people. We believe in driving at main results by direct paths. We are commercial and industrial; labor, material, capital, transportation, these we consider the "practical" factors. We belong to the "want results," "show me," "ain't no such animal" class. It is *things*, not ideas, that we handle and believe in. The most patriotic thing I can say is that we are —— fools. No thing ever existed that was not first an idea or that can not be shaped and controlled by ideas. The average American business man believes nothing is "practical" unless he can feel it with his fingers or enter it on the pages of a ledger. And thereby proves himself an infant in swaddling-clothes, or an adult imbecile. And all the rest of us are a good deal like him. Wherefore the Hun, who, for all his brutishness, is intelligent enough to understand that ideas are more important and more practical than things, has been able to entangle us in a net whose strength is almost wholly psychological.

The Hun wove this kind of net because he knew that to control the ideas of men is to control every concrete thing that men possess. We let him "get away with it" because we were too drunk with our childish delusion that only things were "practical."

THE Hun is so alive to the value of his psychological net that he guards from publicity its very existence; he has prevailed thus far solely because of it and he knows that if we begin to realize the importance of that net his immediate and his ultimate hopes are dead. I have heard that any one who sees the psychological net and tries to warn his fellows will be marked down by the Hun machine and quieted or—removed. Probably you and I differ because you do not believe that and I consider it very possible. God knows that if I knew more of the inside, definite details I'd gladly shout them from the house-tops. I do not know them, but I can see the web; the details are important only as a means for making *you* see it. If I can make any see it who have not seen it hitherto I do not mind seeming silly and childish to the rest of you by suggesting that, if any calamity "happens" to drop on me after this is published, said "accident" might be taken as tending to prove the very point I wish to make.

DOUBTLESS most of you will consider merely silly and fantastic the report that German thoroughness and understanding of psychological values has led them to install at Berlin a little corps of men steeped in the psychological wisdom of India, adepts in human "mysteries" laughed at by the "practical" Western world, and that hypnotism on an international scale is one of the weapons systematically used by the Hun machine. Personally I do not consider it silly and fantastic; it may not be true, and yet it may. Certainly it is in keeping with German methods, and I am not fool enough to laugh it off the boards merely because I can't pinch it with my fingers. In any case it is a perfect example of the *kind* of net they have been spinning for generations.

THIS (to come back to our letter) is why I am strong for drastic action against the German language in our schools, for that and publications in German are an essential part of the Hun web. The letter's suggestion that German be barred from all our primary schools seems to hit at the heart of the matter, but the remedy should go further. For example, no German course should be open at any time to any child of German parentage or birth.

As to the German press there is only one safe argument against suppressing it at least during the war—the plea that loyal publications in German can be of value in creating American loyalty among Germans. I do not belive this argument is sufficient.

IN GENERAL, Mr. Sexton's letter is based on the principle that no one is fit to be a citizen of the United States unless he is fully able to speak the language of the United States, fully able to transact all the business of a citizen of the United States in the language of the United States. A sound principle and a truth so elementary that we seem very stupid in being so long in seeing that truth. Any organization in support of this would be good, but it is to be remembered that there is already a strong organization working along similar lines—the American Defense Society, 44 East 23d Street, New York City, N. Y.

This is Mr. Sexton's letter; he can be addressed in our care.

DEAR SIR:—I propose the formation of "The American Language League." Objects: (a) Enactment of legislation (with concurrent development of public sentiment) to prohibit the teaching of any alien language in any primary school, whether public or private. (b) The suppression, so far as possible, of daily newspapers published in an alien tongue (whether or not they print parallel columns in English). (c) The Americanization of immigrants as quickly and completely as possible by providing facilities for learning the English language and encouragement to make use of said facilities. (d) Legislation limiting the rights of aliens to vote to such of them as can read and write and speak English fluently. (e) The development of a sentiment hostile to organizations designed to keep alive the interest of foreigners in alien governments, customs and institutions.

But the one weapon of sharp steel wherewith to fight alien intrigue is—*language*. It is because this is so true that the German Government through its agents in America fights so hard to retain the German language in the daily life of our people. Remove it and the Kaiser goes with its removal. You can not have a real American country unless the members thereof think exclusively in the American language and approach other languages as they approach Greek or Latin or as they learn some modern and unfamiliar language in the years of youth or manhood as an elective study.

If some of the "Adventurers" started such an organization I believe it would quickly acquire many thousands in members. Dues nominal.—A. R. SEXTON.

DR. ROBERTSON, our comrade in Honduras, tells me I am a stupid skeptic, only he uses more eloquent words of condemnation. Oh, well, all right. I'd be willing to let him call me nearly anything if only he'd go on talking. Skeptic or no, I'm ready to sit and listen. His letters are my idea of a pleasant time. I only regret that a large part of this one dealt with matters political and, though I pretty well agreed with him, it seemed best to omit it.

The —— referred to is one of our writers. Dr. Robertson hopped on to one of his stories and, as is our general custom, we passed the letter on to the author criticized to give him a chance to defend himself or plead guilty.

Galeras, Olancho, Honduras, C. A.

. . . Why did you not spend your holiday with me? I should have been tickled to death. We do not live so badly here that you need fear starvation, *por lo menos*.

Here's the menu of today's dinner:

MENU
Hacienda Las Lajas
28 Sept. 1917
Clear Turtle Soup, with Crackers
Baked Turtle     Cold Tapid-Quinta
Roast Venison     Roast Peccary
Boiled Beef Ribs
Venison Steak fried in Butter, with Onions
Baked Squash     Cabbage     Kale
Creamed Potato and Squash, with Mirliton
Aguacate, with Cheese
Chicken, adobado y estofada
Butter-Holland     Cheese-Stilton     Butter-Native
Pumpkin Pie     Guava Pie     Mango Pie
White Bread     Sweet Bread     Honey
Biscuits     Tortillas
Tea     Coffee     Chocolate
Oranges     Guavas     Mangoes     Pineapples
Music by the Las Lajas String Orchestra

This was a little more plentiful than customary, as the cook was *cumpliendo años* (birthday), and I fancy she was celebrating.

IN RE ROMANCE. That's everywhere, if one only looks for it. It is all in the man. Some men have a capacity for seeing it, and some others for making it, while many—drones in the hive of life—would not know it should they fall over it. Some of us can see only the pleasant lights, others gloom along in the dark shadows. All is in the viewpoint, the outlook. As I write, here comes an example. Here they come! Here they come! Before the tribunal appear—Johnnie Squat and Hipolito Orellana, both bleeding freely.

Johnnie cut the palm of his left hand when cutting a *carizo* with a dull machete. The *carizo* broke and pulled through his hand, making an ugly cut with its razor edge.

Polo gashed his big toe with an ax, and comes, very chastened, saying, "For God's sake, doctor, fix me up quick! I'm losing all my blood. *Ai*, doctor, will it lame me for life? *Quien sabe* when I'll be able to work again?" Johnnie, on the contrary, says to me, "Finish your letter, doctor, this is nothing. The loss of a bit of blood will do me a lot of good. I'm lucky it was my left hand."

And there you have an epitome of life. One always happy, always lucky, the other a poor afflicted being, mourning and moaning. A pessimist and a philosopher. The two extremes.

ROMANCE and Fun are all around. Yesterday, while riding off a bit of ill-temper, I ran across a house of sadness. A woman of some thirty years had lost her daughter, who was washed, clothed in her cerements, and awaiting the ultimate offices.

The grief-stricken mother was seated on the dirt floor, giving loud tongue to her affliction. A peripatetic pedler and I arrived simultaneously. I dismounted to condole with the sufferer, as is right and proper, and expected of every one. Meantime the pedler spread his wares on a temporary bench which he had erected, using a cedar plank, one end on an *abardo* (native saddle) and the other supported on the prone body of a drunk. A most satisfactory display counter indeed.

"*Ai*, Mother of God, *Virgen del Carmen, se me fue mi muchachita*, my child is gone. My poor heart is breaking. Have mercy, O God, on a poor suffering mother. *Cuanto vale la cinta rosada, señor?* (What price the red ribbon, sir?) *Ai, Dios, que dolor!* (God! what suffering!) I'll give you a real the vara. *Socorreme, Dios* (Save me, God!). Are you carrying silk handkerchiefs? *Ai, Madre Sanctissima*—" and at this juncture the outside leg of the bench woke up, gave a heave, in two senses of the word, upset the apple-cart and presented his breakfast—or supper, mayhap—to the reluctant pedler. About this time I made a hurried departure to save my face. And yet they say 'tis a solemn world.

I HAD a nice letter from ——, and I think we'll strike up a friendship after our little spat. You surely stirred up the dog when you forwarded mine to him. He gave me what for in style. He took me to pieces, and scattered them over the landscape. I'm still in a state of dislocation, and fear I shall never get thoroughly assembled again; such his fury. He seems to be a regular fellow under the professorial shell. That's a hard shell to crawl out of, I assure you. . . . *In re* the handicap of your rules—piffle! Most rules are more honored in the breach than in the observance, and, more to the point, 'tis the fate of all rules, from the original ten, on downward. Finite man may lay no plan for the morrow; all is subject to change. Can you formulate a rule for the mutations of the kaleidoscope? What else is life, pray tell me? Environment makes the organism, and circumstances alter cases, and as both are mutable, mutable also must be the rules. Q. E. D.

This is so long I expect you'll charge me for reading it.—Wm. C. Robertson.

STILL letters come from people asking to join Camp-Fire. No need to ask. The wish is sufficient.

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman.

# FIREARMS, OLD AND NEW

### by D. Wiggins and L. F. Brown

## A Complete History of the Principal Types of Firearms, their Development, and an Authoritative Discussion of Those Now in General Use

THERE are few subjects in which the readers of this magazine are more interested than in firearms. For some years we have considered a department devoted to them. As "Ask Adventure" is best divided into departments according to geographical areas covered, a department on firearms does not belong there, but *Adventure* is not through growing yet and some day we may be able to accept one of the kind offers that have been made by so many of you who are willing to act as *Adventure's* "gun expert."

All magazines now and then allow mistakes in firearms details to creep into their stories and our own magazine has not been guiltless. It is not easy to prevent. A perfect editor of *Adventure* would know not only all about all kinds of firearms but all about some thousands of other subjects equally complex and intricate. I don't. Neither does any one else on the staff. Further, the staff changes from time to time and a comparatively green man replaces one who had begun to learn the things we have to try to learn in this particular office. Yet again, no one man, no two men, can copy-read and proof-read every story that goes into the magazine. Even if one or two of us knew all about firearms, it wouldn't insure against mistakes. Most of our writers are pretty well up on firearms personally, but even this additional check is not enough to prevent a mistake now and then.

YOU, readers, can help, as you have in the past, by pointing out mistakes if we make them. Help comes after the mistake is made, but it tends to prevent similar mistakes in the future. Recently there came a letter from Lloyd F. Brown of the *Allerton* (Iowa) *News* covering an accumulation of our past sins. At least part of the points he made I already knew, but they were made just the same. His letter did two things. First, it made us resolve to get as full and detailed information on firearms as possible for reference here in the office. Second, it made me see that this information would be both interesting and valuable to most of you. There's quite a lot of it, even in condensed form, but it follows here just as it came in to us and I know most of you'll have a good time with it. Here is the letter from Mr. Brown:

I noticed in the Camp-Fire talks that you say you welcome any suggestions that tend to make *Adventure* better, which, of course, is right. Well, here are a couple, small matters, to be sure, that don't really have any effect on the stories but which would make them sound more realistic:.

In the first place, I see in stories now and then references made to .41 and .44 caliber automatics. There is no such thing as a .41 or .44 automatic pistol, the only automatic calibers now made being .22, .25, .30, .32, .35, .38, .45. Knowing this, the discrepancies mentioned above are very jarring to me.

Also, there is reference made in a story in your last issue of a man shooting an automatic and the gun simply screaming as it poured its bullets forth. An automatic does not fire more than one shot to a trigger-pull and no one can work one fast enough to make the mechanism scream, or anywhere near it; and I might state that revolvers can and have been fired faster than any automatic ever was. It (the story) makes mention of the delicate trigger, evidently meaning light trigger-pull. No automatic has a light trigger-pull, all having stiffer pulls than a revolver, as to make them light would be to cause the probable death of the operator from premature explosion caused from the jarring off of the arm from the reaction of the slide.

Also, I hate to read about "automatic revolvers." "There ain't no such animal." An automatic is either a pistol or a machine gun, and no revolver is automatic. Also, if any one thinks he can shoot an automatic under water he'd better take my advice and not try it. He might not get hurt, but the chances are he would.

Also, in the last issue there is a story in which a man has an automatic under water in a lake, dives for it and, coming to the surface, shoots his man, and later states that they (the automatics) work all right when wet. Well, they may work all right when wet, and would fire the first shot all right, but unless the water had time to run out of the slide-spring recess and the magazine and the barrel they wouldn't function for the second shot.

I know all of the above, having tried them all with the exception of shooting the gun under water. I wrote two pistol factories about it and they told me most emphatically not to try it, as it would unquestionably be disastrous. Have owned several of every model and make and caliber of revolver and pistol obtainable in this country and a few not obtainable here.—Lloyd F. Brown.

I wrote to Mr. Brown and in reply came the following interesting letter:

I am glad to see that you took the suggestions I made in the spirit in which they were intended. I can appreciate your position as to proof-readers, etc., as I am a newspaper man.

Your idea as to arranging a list of firearms of the different makes and calibers of arms is a good one, but this subject is a pretty extensive one. I have noticed that most discrepancies in this line are made as to revolvers and automatic pistols and their respective calibers and possibilities. It is truly wonderful the things writers can do with small arms.

Most of them seem to have the idea that automatic pistols fire their whole magazines by simply holding back the trigger. This, as I pointed out in my previous letter, is not the case. It can be done by filing off or removing the safety-sear which regulates this, but it would probably be disastrous to the party holding the arm. Automatics have a sharp recoil, public opinion to the contrary notwithstanding; and, as each shot throws the muzzle up a little more, the last few shots would no doubt shoot the shooter in the head. An automatic can not be held rigidly solid, even the smaller calibers, because of the lightning-like shifting of balance and recoil. One must brace the hand for the backward plunge of the action-slide and then brace in the other direction for the forward plunge of the same, which can not be done, as the action is too rapid. Also, it has somewhat the effect of an electric shock. I once fired three shots from a .32-caliber Colt automatic which had been treated to act like a machine gun. I put only three cartridges in the arm, as I knew how the gun would act and I wanted it to stop shooting by the time it was pointed straight up, at least, and the result was that I felt as if I had grasped a live wire.

I am enclosing a list of the makes, models and calibers of small arms obtainable in this country, which may be of some use to you. If so you are welcome to it. I can make a list of the makes and calibers of rifles if you wish, though this is such an extensive subject that I don't know all of it. I am, however, acquainted with practically all the makes used in this country.

The Smith & Wesson Arms Company are now making a revolver to handle the .45 Colt automatic pistol cartridge, but, as they are for the use of the Army only and will not be for sale to the trade for at least a year to come, I will not list this caliber in the revolvers.—Lloyd F. Brown.

Here is the list Mr. Brown inclosed. Many of you know most or all of it already, but to any one the list as an assembled whole has decided value:

First, I wish to state that there is no such thing as an automatic revolver. A small arm must be either a revolver, automatic pistol or single shot or double-barreled pistol (an arm seldom seen).

### SMITH & WESSON—*Revolvers*

Model 1908 Military Model—Calibers, .44 Special, .44 Russian, .44-.40 (.44 Winchester), .38-.40 (.38 Winchester), .45 Colt.

Model 1905 Military and Police Model—Calibers, .38 S. & W. Special, and .32-20 (.32 Winchester).

Model 1902 Military and Police Model—Same as above, except it has a round instead of a square butt.

Regulation Police Model—A pocket-size revolver taking the regular .38 S. & W. cartridge, which is not as powerful as the .38 Special.

Regulation Police Model—.32 S. & W. caliber, a small cartridge not so powerful as the .32-20.

Perfected Model—A small pocket-size revolver made in the regular .38 S. & W. caliber only.

Break or Hinge Model—A small pocket-size revolver made in the .32 short caliber only, a very small and weak cartridge.

Hand Ejector Model—.32 caliber, a small-sized pocket revolver made to take the .32 long or short cartridge.

Hand Ejector Model—Caliber, .22, the smallest good revolver made, to take the smallest cartridges manufactured, the .22 caliber long or short cartridge.

Bekeart Model—A fine, heavy-framed .22 caliber target revolver.

New Departure Safety Hammerless Models—Made in the regular .38 caliber and for the .32 short cartridge, both pocket sizes.

### SMITH & WESSON—*Single Shot*

Single Shot Target Pistol—Made in .22 caliber only.

#### *Automatics*

.35 Caliber—Small pocket size.

### SAVAGE—*Automatic Pistols*

.380 Caliber—A pocket size taking a short .38 caliber cartridge, called the .380 to distinguish it from the regular .38 automatic cartridge.

.32 Caliber—Same as above, only a trifle smaller, to take the .32 automatic cartridge.

### COLT—*Revolvers*

New Service—A very large, heavy revolver, made in calibers .38-40, .44-40, .44 Special, .44 Russian, .45 Colt, .450 Webley and .455 Webley.

New Service Target—Same as above, only smoother finished. In the .45 Colt, .44 Special and .44 Russian calibers only.

Army Special—A fine, heavy revolver, not so large as the New Service; made in the following calibers: .32-.20, .38 Special (using the .38 Colt or S. & W. Special cartridge, .38 Long Colt and .38 Short Colt cartridges in same arm), and .41 Colt, long or short.

Officers' Model—An excellent target revolver made in the .38 Special caliber only, using same cartridges as above mentioned—.38.

Police Positive—A pocket-size revolver made in the regular .38 and the .32 long or short calibers.

Police Positive Special—About same size as regular Police Positive, but using the .32-20 or .38 Special cartridges. The smallest revolver ever made to use such powerful ammunition.

Pocket Positive—Similar to the Police Positive but smaller and made in .32 long or short caliber only.

Single Action Army—A large revolver made in calibers .32-20, .38 Special (now discontinued), .41 (recently discontinued), .38-40, .44-40, .44 Special or Russian, .45 Colt.

*Automatic Pistols*

.45 Government Model—A large military automatic.
.38 Military Model—A large military model.
.38 Pocket—Same as above but with shorter barrel and handle.
.380 Pocket—A small pocket automatic using the same cartridge as the .380 Savage.
.32 Pocket—A small-sized arm, same as above but in .32 caliber.
.25 Pocket—A very small pistol using the .25 automatic cartridge only.
.22 Target—A new model using the regular .22 long rifle cartridges.

### Cheap American-Made Revolvers

In the regular .38 or .32 calibers: H. & R. (Harrington & Richardson), H. & A. (Hopkins & Allen, now out of business), Iver Johnson, U. S., and a few other makes of very inexpensive arms, such as Bull Dog, Young America.

STEVENS

.22, .25 and .32 single-shot pistols only. The H. & A. people also made a single-shot pistol.

### Foreign Arms

Mauser—.30, a large arm. Also, .25, a small arm. All automatic pistols.
Luger—.30 and 9 mm. or .38, both large arms, and automatics.
Borchardt—Similar to the Luger, .30 caliber.
Schwartzlose—A small .32 automatic.
Webley—.25, .32, .38 and .45 caliber automatics, and .32, .38 and .45 caliber revolvers.

Browning—Automatics, same as the Colt automatics, except that they are the first models, made in the Colt automatic sizes.
The Remington people also made a double-barreled Derringer, in .41 rim-fire short caliber, a weak cartridge.

These are all that occur to me now and I believe they will cover your needs. I forgot to mention that the Harrington & Richardson people make a .25 and a .32 caliber automatic pistol. You understand that the small-caliber arms are all small arms and the large calibers are all large arms.

Now I had also written, on receiving Mr. Brown's first letter, to our old friend D. Wiggins, of Salem, Oregon, asking whether I couldn't arrange with him to cover the whole subject in considerable detail. He rose to the occasion splendidly in the following letter:

Salem, Ore.

I received your letter of the 23rd in due time, and have read the letter of Mr. Brown with very great interest.

His list of American automatics is very complete, but there is a correction to be made: the H. & R. .25 automatic has been suspended. Other than this I do not know of a single difference in the list he sent.

The automatic is, in my opinion at least, just a man-wounder at short range. From what I can learn of the various makes, they are not the equal of the heavy lead bullets of the big revolvers, say, the Colt and Smith & Wesson .44's and .45's.

As to the automatic only firing one shot at each trigger-pull, B. is exactly right. And I have never seen any automatic fired as fast as a good revolver can be shot, either.

Of course when they are not in good order, as he suggests, they are dangerous to handle. Witness: history sayeth that the first self-loader ever brought into Oklahoma Territory was a .38 Colt automatic pistol. It was brought as a sample by a drummer for a Chicago hardware firm. He was exhibiting it in a hotel lobby at Muskogee, I. T., and Bud Ledbetter, the U. S. Marshal for the Creek Nation, was watching him demonstrate it. As Bud is reputed to have caused something like thirty-eight bad citizens to leave this vale of tears with their boots on, he was doubtless trying to wise up on new methods of law enforcement.

Well, the spatter-gun commenced to give a fine exhibition of a Maxim and the populace is reported as wearing window-sashes home for neck ornaments. The cigar salesman at his booth ducked his head just in time to have a bullet put a permanent part in his hair. The drummer held on to the gun for the first few shots, like one dazed, as he may well have been. At last he dropped the spitfire on the floor and it fired twice more, spinning like a top. Bud picked the weapon up and, as the drummer refused ever to touch it again, he kept it, and just before I left the State he killed four or five colored members of a criminal organization with it. An examination of the mechanism by a gunsmith showed the nose of the sear to have been broken off in some unknown manner.

I can shoot as well with an automatic as I ever saw any one shoot, and I must say that if my man were over ten yards from me I would never try to get him in a hurry with one of those guns. Ed L. Carson was *writing* when he wrote:

"When a maverick starts a-millin'
Or a bad man needs a-killin'
Let me grab my good old-fashioned forty-five."

As to the flying-up propensities of the automatic I am not able to state, as my chief trouble with them was always to get the muzzle high enough to hit within a foot of where I wanted the bullet to land.—Donegan Wiggins.

And here is the "dope" itself. Mr. Wiggins has not only given us facts but he's put an amazing amount of color into them. I'll venture that both the tenderfoot and the crankiest gun-crank of you all will have a pretty good time reading it:

Salem, Ore.

Well, the rough draft is inclosed. Look it over, give me the points that you wish to have me go over with more care, and then I will stir myself.

As I have been working at this at all times of the day and night, it is apt to be a rather crude document, both as regards spelling and arrangement, not to mention the way ye olde mille balls up once in a blue moon. However, I think you will be able to get the general drift. You once spoke of having given the once-over to a manuscript written on a rattlesnake skin.

This is, of course, not complete. That will take considerable time. This is just to give you a ready reference for the office to use. For instance, John Jones alludes to a Winchester automatic pistol, when there ain't no such animal. Or to Captain Kidd defending his life with a six-shooter.

However, most of the contributers get their gun material so correct that it does not appear to need much of the blue pencil.

I especially enjoy the articles by the Associate Editors in the back pages, and their answers to correspondents. Mr. Harriman is especially interesting to me, as I have been over a certain amount of the same ground as he. When I get rich (?) I'm going down to the Golden State to live once more.

It's a relief to a gun-crank like the writer to get a magazine like *Adventure* to read, one that is not written by a bunch of weak sisters that sit in a sunny window and write about wonderful young women who drive wicked outlaws out of the towns at the point of a .22 bulldog, as some of the present scribes would fain pass out to us in other publications.—D. WIGGINS.

### Firearms, Past and Present

The origin of firearms and explosives is wrapped in mystery. It is supposed that the Carthaginians used blasting compounds, but nothing is certainly known. It is recorded that the inhabitants of a town in India repulsed the troops of Alexander with flames and thunders. Greek fire was a well-known war engine of the Middle Ages, supposed to have been naphtha.

Gunpowder appears to have come from the Far Eastern countries, Korea or China. There is no record of the first use of guns, but it is conceded that the Celestials were in possession of the secret of the smoking weapons as early as the seventh century, A. D.

The invention of gunpowder in Europe is ascribed to a friar, one Roger Bacon, who was so progressive that I am surprised that he was not attended to by the Inquisition as a wizard. Berthold Schwartz also was raising Cain and smoke about the same time, so we do not know to whom William S. Hart is most deeply indebted.

It is said that the English used cannon at Crécy, but the credit for the victory is due to the long bow in the hands of the English yeomen. Firearms did not play much of a part in war till the beginning of the sixteenth century, as till that time the bow had a greater range. The shoulder arms seem to have appeared about 1485. They were a novelty.

The gun was in its element in the conquest of the Americas. The natives regarded the wielders as gods. Said belief was soon shattered by a short observation of the actions of the newcomers.

It is recorded that Cortez had three breechloaders in his campaign in Mexico. They were a crude type of wedge breech, and could be loaded very fast, but were not very strong on velocity and penetration.

All firearms up to this time had been the matchlock, so called from the fact that the charge was ignited by the flash of the powder in a shallow flash-pan on the breech of the barrel. The flame was communicated through a small hole in the barrel, the powder in the pan being ignited by the slow match carried by the soldier.

The arm was loaded as follows: First, the powder was poured in the muzzle and a wad placed over and rammed down on the powder. Then a ball was inserted, sometimes wrapped in a greased patch, but more often not. This was rammed down, and then the cover of the flash-pan was raised, and a little priming powder poured in the pan, the cover then being let down upon it.

The great objections to the matchlock were that it was visible at night, it was liable to be extinguished by wet weather, and it was apt to be fired by a high wind blowing the powder on to the spark.

The wheellock came about 1525, from Nuremberg. It was manipulated in the same manner as the matchlock, with the difference that the firing was by sparks caused by the action of a toothed wheel on a bit of flint held by the lock over the pan. It was a great improvement over the matchlock.

A curious tale is told of the Thirty Years' War: A detachment of the Swedish troops of Gustavus Adolphus was besieging a town held by the Austrians. The latter surrendered one morning, saying that the great reinforcement received by the Swedes made resistance hopeless. They had seen the glowing matches, they said. The Swede commander was too foxy to let on that the supposed army was a swarm of fireflies. Who said "Squarehead"?

The flintlock supplanted the preceding ones about 1675. It is the invention of a bunch of Dutch brigands who were in the habit of eloping with their neighbors' fowls. Not necessarily the neighbors' "chickens." This gentle practise gave them the name of "Snaphanns," and the term became "Snaphaunce." The wheellock was a rich man's tool; the honest robber was forced to extemporize something that a watchful hen-owner couldn't see after dark. He did it.

The flintlock was made by all the gunmakers of the day, but the English probably made the best ones. I have read that a great London maker by the name of Joseph Manton finally reached such a pinnacle of perfection that his locks were capable of eighty per cent. of fires. Most of the flintlocks giving forty to sixty per cent. The flintlock also was difficult to use, as there was an appreciable pause before the shot due to the slowness of the ignition of the powder in the barrel from the powder in the pan.

The American rifle was the finest development of the flintlock, and to the skill of the frontiersman with his Deckard is due our national pride in shooting today. Also our independence.

In 1807 a Scots clergyman invented the percussion system of ignition and revolutionized firearms. At first the explosive mixture was in the form of a small pill. This gave the guns using them the name of "pill-locks." Soon the familiar—to our daddies—form of percussion cap came and the rainstorm had no more terrors for hunter or soldier.

'Tis said that Napoleon offered Forsyth the sum of $50,000 for his invention, but the patriotic dominie refused. He offered his invention to the British Government, who treated him with scorn, and only was won to the right view in time to pay a few thousand dollars after his death. Truly, the way of the inventor is hard, and if he's a patriot it is still rougher.

In 1836 Colt placed on the market his world-famous revolver, and in the hands of the citizenry of the Texas republic it won fame. If we had old Sam with us today to produce equally record-breaking weapons we would lead K. B. up Broadway in chains. He was the man, more than any other, who made possible the rapid expansion of the United States in the years 1840-1890. As we read that he was a man of a most violent temper, I think that he was trying to fix up something faster than a single-shot pistol or a Bowie knife for his intercourse with his opponents. Probably couldn't kill 'em off fast enough with the existing armament. John M. Browning is his modern type, as to ingenuity.

Whitney in about 1820 devised the method of making arms by machinery to such an extent that all parts of the same kind were interchangeable. This was a big step in the right direction, as previously all broken guns were a matter for expensive hand work by the individual gunsmith.

Guns having a heavy barrel were used with both ball and shot in countries where a different type of game might be met. India, for instance.

Three-barreled guns were also well liked, and four barrels were not unknown to sportsmen.

The first repeater, as we now know it, was the Volcanic, appearing about 1856. It was a crude weapon, and was not a great success. The Henry, 1860, and the Spencer, 1863, were much better arms in every sense of the word.

Winchesters first appeared in 1866 and have been with us since. Smith & Wesson revolvers came about 1856.

Since that time the advance has been too rapid to catalogue. The Sharps, Remington, Winchester, Ballard, Hotchkiss and others have made more history than any of our readers are likely ever to see. About all of the real wild life of the globe seems to have been tamed, except for spots like Mexico, Tibet, and the present disturbance accross the herring-pond. That can not rightly be termed a bit of aboriginal deviltry; it's highly civilized; liquid fire, gas, non-combatants tortured and slain, etc. How Geronimo must revolve in his grave with envy!

Roughly speaking, flintlocks up to 1820, percussion to 1860, revolvers to date from 1836, breech-loaders from 1860, repeaters the same. Automatics from 1899 to date, the old Borchart and French arms not being known to any great extent. I think the Borchart was invented in 1893. It was a funny-looking thing, looking like a letter "T" with a short upright.

So if any one tries to run anything in before these dates you may consider him either a gun-crank of the thirty-second degree, or a faker. In the latter case I think you had better draw the editor's faithful weapon, the printers' towel, and assassinate him on the spot. See E. Wilson Nye for details.

As to some tricks that will naturally drop into stories. The double roll was done by hanging the old single-action Colt's revolver on the forefinger and whirling it over rapidly. If the roller was expert and the mainspring was not too strong the revolver would cock and fire itself by its own weight, the thumb catching the hammer in its revolution, and the trigger being pulled by the gun's weight coming on it as the roll brought it over.

Fanning was a great favorite with some of the more spectacular of the old gun-fighters, but I never knew positively of but one man killed by the trick. The Colt was held in the right hand, low down by the right side, the trigger held back, and the hammer slapped swiftly by the left hand; the result was a stunning volley of shots that rarely hit anybody.

The road-agent spin was done by presenting the weapon to a captor upon the palm of the open hand and, as he reached to pick it up, it was whirled over and discharged. Many a good officer was killed in this manner, which is attributed to Billy the Kid.

Many gun-fighters removed the trigger from the old Colt single-action completely; some tied it back, snapping the gun with the hammer only. It was quick and picturesque.

A modern double-action can be fired quicker than any automatic I have ever seen, and I am not exactly without experience in that line. I think a man in Denver, McCutcheon, has fired his Smith & Wesson in one second for five shots. How's that for a .38 Special, all on a man-size target?

The automatic will not fire more than one shot at each pull of the trigger, unless there is some defect in the gun. This does not apply to machine guns, of course.

As to fancy shooting, no one can with certainty tell just what can be done. I have done a little in my time, and have seen some really fine work with both rifle and revolver. Such men as Toeperwine and Gus Peret can do things with a rifle or revolver that you would brand as impossible, till you had seen them shoot. Gus, for instance, will hold his revolver upside down and beat the best that I can do shooting in regular fashion, while I in turn can trim the average shot in the same manner.

I have heard of one desperado who terrorized the Northwestern border some years back. He was reputed to have killed about half a dozen of the Northwest Mounted. He was said to be able to lay a rifle across his arm and, while working the lever and shooting with deadly certainty, to be able to feed cartridges into the magazine through the loading gate in the side of the frame while keeping up a steady fire. This with a Winchester, of course.

There is an old rifle with a history in a drug-store in Baker, Oregon. It is an old 1873 Winchester and was found on a bluff overlooking upper Powder River, rusted into an unrecognizable mass. It was finally cleaned up so that we could identify it. It lay under a skeleton that had a bullet-hole squarely between the eyes, and the remains of about fifty cartridge-heads lay around. Probably a lone miner or cowboy who had been driven there by the Indians and made a game stand. Or it may have been a cattle rustler; there have been some queer things done on the edge of the land. I tried to get the gun, but the owner will not part with it.

Now as to machine guns. As I said before, I don't know as much now as I will in a short time, but then I won't be allowed to talk, I presume.

Here in America there are the Colt, Savage, Lewis and the Bénèt-Mercier. The latter is the service gun, and won the dislike of all soldiers by the way it jams at a crucial time. It is claimed, and probably with truth, that if one of the two guns in barracks at Columbus had not jammed they would not have had the orders to get him "dead or alive." He would have been dead already.

The English use a variety of guns; I recall the Maxim, the Hotchkiss, the Lewis, the B. S. A., and many others. Most of the machine guns now in use in the respective armies use the small-arm ammunition, but I understand that special guns for the warplanes are using cartridges up to an inch in diameter.

By the way, here's a little history that you may know already. When Hudson Maxim invented his famous gun he offered it to the War Department first and found a cold shoulder turned toward him. England welcomed him with open arms and knighthood. Lewis, a retired colonel of the U. S. Army, was treated the same way, and his gun won fame as the "Belgian Rattlesnake." Incidentally, the famous inventor Wiggins drew the same deal on a sight he patented and offered to his uncle, like a dutiful nephew.

## Modern Firearms

As to present-day firearms, we have a host of different makes, calibers and models. I list such as I am familiar with:

### WINCHESTERS

Model 1873—Calibers, .32, .38 and .44 W. C. F. (Discontinued.)

Model 1876—Calibers, .40-60, .45-60 and .45-75. (Discontinued.)

Model 1883, or Hotchkiss—Caliber, .45-70. (Discontinued.)

Model 1886—Calibers, .38-56, .38-70, .40-65, .40-70, .40-82, .45-70, .45-90, .50-100 and .50-110. Now made for .33 high-power also. All discontinued except, .45-70, .45-90, .50-110, and .33 calibers.

Model 1890—Caliber, .22 only.

Model 1892—Calibers, .25-20, .32, .38 and .44 W. C. F.

Model 1894—Calibers, .25-35, .30-30, .32 Special, .32-40 and .38-55.

Model 1895—Calibers, .30-40, .303 British, .30 '03 and .30 '06, .35 and .405 Winchester, .38-72, .40-72. Two latter are now discontinued.

The automatics run from the .22 caliber up; .32, .351, .35, and the .401, the most powerful automatic made.

Shotguns are made in 10, 12, 16 and 20 gage.

No Winchester revolvers or pistols were ever made, some writers to the contrary notwithstaning.

### REMINGTONS

Autoloading (also called automatic)—Calibers, .25, .30, .32 and .35 only. Slide actions the same, with the old-style .38 and .44 in addition.

Remingtons made rifles of all descriptions since 1816, and I am not familiar with all the models. The Remington-Keene and the later models of the Remington-Lee were powerful weapons, the latter being a high-power rifle and made in calibers from .236 (or 6 mm.) up to .45-90.

### SAVAGES

Savages are made in .22 H. P., .250-3000, .25-35, .30-30, .303, .32-40, and .38-55. Light .22 repeaters are also made. Savage automatic pistols are made in calibers .32 and .380. A few experimental .45's were made for the U. S. Army, and the only ones that were ever offered the public were the ones rejected from the tests when automatics were selected by the Board of Ordnance.

### MARLINS

Marlins are made in calibers .22, .32 and .25 rimfire. In more powerful models they are made in .25-20, .32-20, .38-40, .44-40, .25-35, .30-30, .32 Special, .32-40, .38-55, .38-56, .38-70, .40-70,.45-70 .45-85 and .45-90.

Shotguns are made in 12, 16 and 20 gages.

### COLTS

Colt's revolvers are made in .22, .32, .38, .41, .44, .45, .450, .455 and .476 calibers. The last three are for English shells.

Colt automatics are made in .22, .25, .32, .380, .38 and .45 calibers.

Colts formerly made rifles and shotguns, but have ceased to do so several years since. Many models of their revolvers have been discontinued and I am not familiar with them. Their most popular model for hard service is still the old model that Colonel Colt placed on the market in 1836, with the various improvements necessary to adapt it to cartridges, it being a muzzle-loader when first brought out. Catalogued as the Single-Action Army and Frontier.

Many makes of firearms have been discontinued and off the market for years; but the ones I have mentioned are the ones in most general use to-day in America, and to a great extent in the whole world. The Winchester can be found in every country under the sky.

### MAUSERS

In Europe before the beans were spilled the Mauser and the heavy double-barreled rifle were the heavy game and man-killing weapons. The Mauser is the parent, with but two exceptions, as nearly as I can tell, of every rifle that is drilling holes in Wilhelm's cohorts today. The two exceptions are the Winchester and the Martini.

Mausers have been in use since 1871 and were modeled on the old needle gun, as made by Dreyse, supposedly. They were made in calibers .256, .275, .280, .30, .315, .358, .376, .400, .420, .425 and 433. I think one was made in .460 caliber, but am not sure. Mauser made a great many actions and barrels for other manufacturers, who finished the fine points themselves and then labeled the gun as their own product. This was particularly true of the English gunmakers. They furnished Mausers for a bewildering array of ammunition, and for every conceivable game under the sun. Incidentally, they demanded many shekels for their handiwork; so much, in fact, that I never felt justified in purchasing any of their wares.

Yes, there *is* an automatic revolver made, Mr. Brown to the contrary notwithstanding. It is the Webley-Fosbery, made by the Webley Company, the contractors to the British Government. It is made in .38 and .450-455 calibers. Walter Winans, the expert shot, praises it highly.

For the man who is going "Out There" a good thing to remember when stocking up on firearms is that the sizes of ammunition most easily found in out-of-the-way places are the following ones:

.22 caliber rifle and pistol cartridges.

12-gage shotgun shells.

.44 Winchester (or .44-40) rifle cartridges.

These can almost always be picked up in any store, and even in most camps a man runs across one. In this country the .30-30 rifle ammunition is almost as easily obtained, but I do not think it would be so in foreign countries.

For the man who needs weapons that can be always used in any country, from the ammunition view-point, I would recommend the following battery:

One rifle or carbine, caliber .44 or .30-30, as the individual preference map dictate.

One Colt or Smith & Wesson revolver, as the individual may prefer; using the rifle shell in .44.

One shotgun, 12 gage, double or repeater.

This armament can always be depended upon to get food in any country, and the ammunition is not expensive; it can usually be replenished at out-of-the-way places.

If a man must go stripped down to his clothes and one weapon, I would choose a double-barreled shotgun. This, with shot shells for small game, and a few ball loads for large mammals, is without doubt the one all-around gun. In a mixed-game country carry one barrel loaded with shot and the other with the round ball. The latter is deadly at a range of fifty yards and gives terrible shocking effect.

The automatics are at present the best thing in the one-hand gun for close work that we have. I refer to the Colt .45 automatic pistol, adopted by the Government, of course. While it does not appear to give the shocking effect of the big calibers using black powder and soft-lead bullets, I would consider it effectual for pretty nearly anything that a weapon of self-defense is ever used for. And you can slip in an extra magazine in the time it takes you to put one shell in the big revolvers.

Just a little hint: when going to an argument with adversaries of homicidal tendencies, wear a big revolver openly at your belt, and a smaller one on the opposite side of your body, under a coat. As long as you don't reach for the big fellow your opponent will not suspect you and you can get the drop on him without much trouble in case he proves warlike. This is given in Walter Winans's work on revolver shooting, and seems to be good advice, so I pass it over.

### Rifles

*American*—Winchester, Savage, Marlin, Remington, Stevens, Newton, and the hand-made weapons of Adolph, of Genoa, New York. These arms are modern ones, in the course of manufacture. Some of the older ones whose manufacture has been discontinued are as follows: Spencer, Henry, Sharps, Howard, Robinson, Maynard, Peabody, Whitney, Kennedy, Ballard, Bullard, Allen, Forehand & Wadsworth, Hopkins & Allen, Star, Merril, Smith, Ward-Button, Colt, Wesson, Joslyn, Evans, and Blake. More modern ones now off the market are the Remington-Lee, Lee Straighpull, Standard, and Blake.

*English*—B. S. A., Westley-Richards, Rigby, Jeffery, Webley & Scott, Purdy, Lewis & Sons, Lancaster, and Greener. Pretty nearly every English gunmaker made rifles of one sort or another, but did not always place their name on the gun. Ross rifles are made in Canada; are excellent.

*German*—Mauser, Mannlicher and double and single barrel tip-up actions are met with. Mauser commercial actions are sold by the Mauser works to gunmakers in every country, and by these makers stocked and finished to be sold as their own make. Mannlichers the same.

*Austrian*—Mannlicher the standard arm, but the Schoenauer is a popular and excellent action.

France, Spain, Italy and Russia have distinctive military rifles, but their sporting weapons are almost all imported ones from Germany and the United States. Scandinavian countries use the Krag-Jorgensen service arm.

### Actions

Omitting .22's as not worth consideration, the leading actions of the world are as follows:

Winchesters, lever and automatic actions at present; bolt actions were made in .45-70 and .236 calibers, both now discontinued. Shotguns are slide, lever and automatic.

Savage rifles are lever action in all sizes above .22, except the .22 high-power, which is a lever action.

Marlins are lever action in everything above .25 rimfire in power. Their shotguns are all slide, or pump, actions.

Remington rifles are slide and automatics. Bolt actions and single-shots have been discontinued. Shotguns are pump and automatics. Revolvers and pistols have been discontinued.

Newtons are the latest comer in the firearms line, and are probably the best we have. They are powerful bolt actions. No short arms made.

Fred Adolph of Genoa, makes fine arms to order by hand, having learned his art in Germany. He, Ludwig Wundhammer, and W. Wilshire of Los Angeles, California, produce nothing but high-grade arms made to the order of the sportsmen.

Colts formerly made repeating rifles in both lever and slide actions and double-barreled shotguns, but have not made any of these arms for years. They make no automatic rifle.

The Henry, Spencer, and Sharps, with the old Springfield needle gun, helped civilize the West. They were popular and reliable weapons. The first two were rimfire repeaters, the latter was a heavy single-shot center-fire rifle. Sharp made a repeater and offered it to the Government testing department, but it was rejected, and I do not think it was ever on the market. Sharp's pistols were made in four-barrel types, also, but for small cartridges. The Sharp, by the way, was the first reliable breech-loading weapon we ever had. Invented, according to Bannerman, in 1848.

I do not consider the Hall breech-loader rifle a practical arm, as a number of men lost their thumbs by its blowing open. It was invented about 1810.

English rifles are made in a great variety of styles and actions, from the old Snider to the latest type of bolt action for the high-power cartridges for big-game shooting. The favorites are the bolt action and the double-barreled rifle. They are made in calibers ranging from .22 Savage high-power to the .600 caliber and the 4 bore. I can not manage to recount all the different calibers and cartridges, as some of the same shells are known by a different name with every maker.

English shotguns are made in double and single barrel styles. The automatic is made, I have read, but has never met with favor. They are not strong for a multishot gun there.

The English revolvers I do not know much about, but the Webley is the service weapon, and from what I have seen of them they are a reliable gun, although very clumsy, and of complicated design. I guess they deliver the goods.

As to the other European nations, I am under the impression that the bolt action is the standard, and this, in fact, is the only action that stands up well under the terrific shock of the heavy loads of smokeless powder now favored by big-game hunters.

American rifles are exported to a considerable extent, but more go to South America than to Europe or Africa. Asia seems impartial, from what I can learn.

### Shotguns

*America* makes the Parker, Fox, Ithaca, Smith, Winchester, Remington, Marlin, Union, Chicago, Biffar, Davis, Folsom, Harrington & Richardson, Hopkins & Allen, Iver Johnson, Baker, Lefever, Stevens, Royal, and Tobin. Winchester, Marlin, Remington and Union are pumps; Remington and Winchester are automatics; all others are double and single barreled. Both hammerless and hammer styles are made, with the former in the lead.

*England*—Andrews, Anson, Osborne, Bonehill, Halloway Naughton, Lancaster, Osborne, Pulverman, Webley & Scott, Lang, Westley Richards, and Jeffery. All these are double and single barrels. No repeaters to my knowledge. Some are made to handle ball or shot equally well and are a favorite weapon in a mixed-game field.

*Belgium*—Parkhurst, Browning, Pieper, and Francotte. Browning is an automatic, the rest are double and single barrels.

*Germany*—Daly, Sauer, and others I am not familiar with. Three-barreled guns, two-shot barrels with a rifle barrel under and between them are very popular. A close friend of mine killed a game warden with one, I shall always believe. He praised its execution highly.

All the above double-barrel and single-barrel guns are made in 12 gage, and most of them in 10, 16 and 20 gages also. Automatics are 12 gage in United States, but a 16-gage Browning is made in Europe.

Now for my pets, the short guns.

### Revolvers

*America*—Colt, Smith & Wesson, Iver Johnson, Harrington & Richardson, Forehand and Wadsworth, Hopkins & Allen, Meriden. There are some old-timers, now discontinued, that may figure in stories, so I list them: Starr, Remington, Bacon, Marlin, Whitney, Smith, Thomas, Savage, Morse and Pettengill. Civil War period and soon after.

*England*—Webley. Old-timers, Tranter, and Dean & Adams. Colt made revolvers in London in the 50's, I hear.

*Russia*—Naegants.

*Spain*—Orbea Hermanos.

### Automatics

#### *Rifles*

*American*—Winchester, .22, .32, .35, .351, .401. Remington, .22, .25, .30, .32, .35. Standard, .25, .30, .32, .35. (No longer made.) Savage and Febiger (Batavia,) .22 only.

*Belgium*—Browning (same as our Remington), caliber .35, I think.

*Austria*—Mannlicher, caliber unknown.

*Sweden*—Sjogren, shotgun and rifle; caliber unknown.

#### *Pistols*

*America*—Colt, Savage, Smith & Wesson, Harrington & Richardson, Warner.

Colt, .22, 25, .32. 380-38 and .45. Colt & Savage, .45. Smith & Wesson .35 only. Harrington & Richardson, .32 and .25. Warner, .32 only.

*England*—Webley & Scott; calibers, .25, .32, .380 and .45. Also the Webley-Fosbery automatic revolver, caliber, .450-455.

*Germany*—Luger, Mauser, Waither, Schwarslose and, I think, the Borchart. Calibers: Luger, .7.65 mm. and .9 mm. Mauser, .7.63 mm.; Borchart, .30; light Mauser, .32 and .25; Walther, the same; Schwarslose, .32.

*Belgium*—Browning, Bayard and Pieper, .25, .32 and .35. Bergman, 9 mm.

*Austria*—Mannlicher, various calibers up to 9 mm. (.35). Steyer, not given. Roth-Sauer, .32 or 8 mm.

*Italy*—Brescia, supposed .30 caliber.

The European makers produce so many different automatics that it is not possible to keep up on them. I know an appalling number of patents are granted upon this type of arm, but how many are actually manufactured and how successful they are, it's impossible to state with any accuracy. They turn them out about as we do pocket-knives and Fords.

Over there a great business is done by large firms like the Mauser works at Oberndorff-on-Neckar, where the rough forgings for frames and the rough tubes for barrels are made and supplied to individual makers all over the continent, to be made up into finished arms and labeled as the finisher's own product. Until the war the American makers of shotguns imported practically all their high-grade barrel-tubes and bored and finished them themselves. Incidentally, our domestic tubes were far superior to the imported article, and the price was mostly on the high-sounding foreign name.

Now as regards ammunition. I can not do all I would like to, as it would keep me as busy as a blind paper-hanger with the dobie itch to get them all down. Here's a little on the matter, however.

American rimfire ammunition is made in .22, .25, .30, .32, .38, .41, .42, .44, .46, .50, .52 and .56 calibers. All over .32 rimfire are for obsolete weapons, however—old Spencers, Henrys, Howards, etc.

As to the dates when these were introduced I can give the following: Colts, for fixed ammunition about 1866; Winchesters, the same year; Spencers, in 1863; Henrys, in 1860; Volcanics, in 1856. These were a lever-action arm, made in repeating pistols as well as rifles; now very rare.

The Springfield needle gun was issued as a breechloader in 1863, but was not in general use till 1867. It was conceded to be "Hiyu Cultus" by the Indians, who said "Shootum to-day, killum tomorrow." It was as distinctive a weapon as the six-shooter. The old veteran served in the infantry until 1892, and some of the volunteers shouldered it in the Spanish War. The cavalry used the Spencer till 1877, then the Springfield carbine, the same gun as the infantry, but shorter.

Winchesters came into general use about the time of center-fire cartridges, 1873. They were the favorite gun from that time on. The Winchester Company state that there are about a million of the old model 1873 in use today in every country on the globe.

So there you are. It's good stuff, but a gun-crank isn't really a good one unless he has violent opinions of his own and in so far as space permits we'll gladly present your opinions or additions at our semi-monthly meetings.

# ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

## Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

## Back Issues of *Adventure*

Wanted: November 3, 1919 (Vol. I, No. 1) issue of *Adventure.* State price postpaid wanted.—Stanley Stotz, 1623 W. St. Catherine, Louisville, Ky.

## Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

## Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

## General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

## Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

## Letter-Friends Back Home

**A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp or at the Front.**

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure,*" letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

Corporal D. E. Wetherell, care *Adventure.*

A. L. Miles, care *Adventure.*

M. G. Wharton, care *Adventure.*

## Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

## Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

## Addresses

**Order of the Restless**—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address Wayne Eberly, 1302 N St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

**Camp-Fire**—Any one belongs who wishes to.

**High-School Volunteers of the U. S.**—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's,* Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

**Rifle Clubs**—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

*(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")*

**A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.**

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

**1. Islands and Coasts**
Captain A. E. Dingle, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

**2. The Sea Part 1**
J. P. Tucker, Hotel Lansdale, 1410 Minor Ave., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

**3. The Sea Part 2**
Captain A. E. Dingle, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Tucker.

**4. Eastern U. S. Part 1**
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay: river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodscraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

**5. Eastern U. S. Part 2**
Hapsburg Liebe, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

**6. Eastern U. S. Part 3**
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

**7. Western U. S. Part 1**
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

**8. Western U. S. Part 2**
Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

**9. Western U. S. Part 3 and Mexico Part 1**
J. W. Robertson, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

**10. Mexico Part 2**
J. W. Whiteaker, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

**11. North American Snow Countries Part 1**
Robert E. Pinkerton, 5036 Utica St., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

**12. ★North American Snow Countries Part 2**
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

**13. ★North American Snow Countries Part 3**
George L. Catton, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

**14. North American Snow Countries Part 4**
Ed. L. Carson, Arlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake, Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

**15. North American Snow Countries Part 5**
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with* 3 *cents in stamps NOT attached)*

***Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.***

**16. Hawaiian Islands and China**
F. J. Halton, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

**17. Central America**
Edgar Young, 415 Eighth Ave., Huntington, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

**18. The Balkans**
Arthur D. Howden Smith, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

**19. Asia, Southern**
Gordon McCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports: hunting, trading, traveling.

**20. Japan and Korea**
Robert Welles Ritchie, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

**21. Russia and Eastern Siberia**
Captain A. M. Lochwitzky (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

**22. Africa Part 1**
Thomas S. Miller, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

**23. Africa Part 2**
George E. Holt, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

**24. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa**
R. W. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada, covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

**25. Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo**
Charles Beadle, Grand Isle, Louisiana. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

**26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa**
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

**27. Australia and Tasmania**
Albert Goldie, 1106 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

## STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

***The following Ask Adventure editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.***

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### Hunting in Alaska

*Question:*—"I am planning to go to Alaska as soon as the Spring opens. What hunting is there to be done there in Spring and Summer? Are hunting licenses necessary to possess and use firearms? If so, how much would a license cost? Are the mining regions open to a newcomer to stake a claim? What region would you advise? Could you refer me to any book that explains the kind of mining carried on there? What caliber rifle do you consider the best for that region?"—George Newman, Detroit, Mich.

*Answer*, by Mr. Solomons:—The hunting in Spring and Summer is not so good, of course, as in Fall and Winter, but Alaska is always a good hunting-ground, though a big one; and it is not easy to get over the ground in Summer. However, with a poling-boat one can cover a great deal of ground on the many rivers.

Fur-bearing animals may be taken at the proper season and under the moderate regulations in force, which you can obtain by writing the Bureau of Fisheries, Washington, D. C. Game animals are rather rigidly protected, however, including deer, moose, caribou, mountain sheep, goats, brown bear—the big fellows—ducks, geese, ptarmigan and other game birds. This is for the market, of course, and killings for personal use by miners or explorers is sanctioned at any time.

A resident of Alaska does not pay a license, but visiting hunters are taxed fifty dollars, if Americans, if foreigners, one hundred dollars. You may obtain the game regulations, and much general information by writing the Geological Survey, or Department of the Interior for "General Information regarding the Territory of Alaska," which will be sent you free of charge.

I prefer a .30-30 Winchester for all 'round work in Alaska, with soft-nosed bullets for quick use on big bear and moose. Any high-powered rifle is good, but the lighter the better. Any one out looking for the big, brown bear or the silver-tip Alaskan grizzly would do well to take a somewhat heavier bore rifle however. Good books for present-day use are, besides the numerous Government publications, Greely's Hand-book of Alaska—Scribner's—and Alaska, An Empire in the Making, by J. J. Underwood—Dodd, Mead & Co.

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### Poor Eyesight at Sea

*Question:*—"I am twenty-one years old and have a good healthy constitution, but owing to shortsightedness am obliged to wear glasses. Would that be any obstacle in getting a position on a vessel? I can operate a typewriter, have an excellent knowledge of bookkeeping and have had a year in high school. Might I get a job as assistant steward, or something of that kind, until I have experience?"—Edward Guild, Adams, Mass.

*Answer*, by Captain Dingle—Your defective eyesight need not prove a bar to sea service entirely, although it is a bad asset for a man seeking to become an officer. You should have no difficulty in getting some sort of a berth, but it is not usually a welcome thing aboard ship that a man is absolutely obliged to wear his glasses while performing his duties. Can you not work without them? A steward's job, for example, at least an assistant steward, consists in waiting on table and general cleaning up. That doesn't require excessively keen vision but of course neither should a man be so imperfect of vision that he would pass a passenger sugar for salt.

In this regard go down to any steamer in your nearest port and apply to the chief steward or purser. There are many jobs that a beginner can take, and after the first trip the rest is simple.

One other chance occurs to me, and I think it is your best method, if you are able to do it. Glasses won't matter there. Take a course in wireless operating—the Marconi Company, Woolworth Building, New York, will tell you how and all about it—then ship through these same people as an operator. You'll rate as officer right away, have a good, respectable job, and it won't matter how your sight is, much, so long as your ears are keen.

### Industrial Conditions in Victoria

*Question:*—"What are the industrial conditions in Victoria? Is there any demand for stenographers and newspaper men, and what is the average wage? My wife is a stenographer and I am a newspaper man. What would be our chance of getting by should we come to your country with a capital of three thousand dollars or less? The statement that I am a newspaper man does not mean that any kind of productive work would not look good to me as I am in excellent health and physical condition."—Kenneth F. Lee, Augusta, Maine.

*Answer*, by Mr. Carson:—You need have no hesitation in coming to this country with the capital you mention, but while there are many good openings for people of your stamp I very much doubt if you will ever want them. You can get a start on a small ranch with what you have and one season in this country will spoil you for indoor employment forever. Just the same it is pleasing to know that it is there in the event of your ever needing it.

I am rather of the opinion that your chances would be better in Seattle if you decide to follow your line of employment, but this is a small matter as the fare from Seattle to Victoria is only $2.50 and the trip only requires some four hours by boat.

If you finally decide to try the coast I wish you to feel that I stand ready to assist you in any way I can. It might be a good idea to come direct to me and take a week to look things over before committing yourselves to any particular line of action. Don't turn on the gratitude flume. I have done this before, as letters published in *Adventure* will show, but I find the satisfaction of making somebody come alive and really live is a big return for any trouble I am put to. I brought one man from New Hampshire and he has smiled ever since. Glad to hear from you at any time and any information I can give you is yours for the asking.

### Panama Woods

*Question:*—"I am seeking information on the country located on the north coast of Panama between Colon and Bocas del Toro, relative to timber possibilities in that section, especially fronting on the Caribbean Sea. What is the character of the timber and its principal growth, or varieties compared with cypress, yellow pine, oak and hickory, and if hard or soft varieties predominate? What are the health conditions and what altitudes are safe for fair health? What are the labor conditions, prevailing prices, and if intelligent and competent or not? Are the people reasonably law-abiding and are the general laws such as would be favorable to investments and general development?"—E. C. Austin, St. Louis, Mo.

*Answer*, by Mr. Young:—Besides the well-known mahogany—swietenia—there are over a hundred other timber trees, having woods suitable for one purpose or another, in the forests of Panama. Prominent among these are the "cedros"—cedrela sp.—of which "cedro amargo"—c. glaziovii—furnishes cigar-box wood and a great deal of imitation mahogany used by cabinet-makers.

Other important lumbers are the numerous "quizarras" which belong to the Lauraceae, the "guayacan"—tecoma crysantha—one of the many woods called lignum vitae, the "laurel"—cordia gerascanthus—and such leguminous trees as the guañacaztli, guapinol, gavilan, candelillos, guachipelin, etc. The guachipelin is very valuable for posts, foundations, etc., because when buried it remains sound almost indefinitely and is not subject to the attacks of insects.

To express it in a few words, the forests of Panama are able to duplicate any character of timber we have here and have left others with which we are not familiar.

With the exception of malaria Panama is healthy in all parts and in the mountains the climate is ideal.

The Panamanian native is worthless as a laborer and all companies who operate in the republic import West Indian negroes for this purpose. These may be had for about a dollar a day and quarters. They are very stupid, also, and have to be driven every minute of the time.

Panama in all parts is very law-abiding and the laws are favorable to investments with the exception of the San Blas Indian country, a strip of land between Colon and Colombia. These Indians are about as ferocious as one would care to encounter.

### Living Conditions in California

*Question:*—"I would like to know about the climate of California in general and Los Angeles in particular. I have heard that there is a long and dreary rainy season in the State. Is that so? What are the working conditions in Los Angeles, particularly in the hotel business—waiters, cooks, etc.? Also what are the chances for a prospective civil engineer? Is there much work in that line either in Los Angeles or elsewhere in the State? Are there good technical schools in the city where one may finish out one's course? What are the conditions of life? Is the cost of necessities high?

Are rents very high and are the dwellings of the lower middle class furnished with modern improvements?"—FRANK PEI, New York, N. Y.

*Answer*, by Mr. Harriman:—The climate of California in general is mild all the year. Where I live our Summers are far less heated than the Eastern and in Winter—well, to illustrate—I am sitting in a chamber-room, no fire going in any part of the house, my windows wide open and I without coat or vest, perfectly comfortable. It is cool at times, occasionally we have frost, and in Summer our nights are always cool, allowing us perfect rest. I always sleep under one single blanket in Summer.

Regarding the long, dreary rainy season, we had fifteen days in 1917 when we did not have sunshine at least part of the day. Could you endure that? There are parts of the State where they have fogs and more cloudy weather, up around San Francisco, for instance. From Santa Barbara to Mexico it is about as here. I have been here 32 years and I wouldn't take New York as a gift if I had to live there.

This is a great place for hotels and they are going to be rushed to the limit from now on. The tourists are beginning to flock in from the frozen, blizzardy East and Middle West, filling everything. Waiters and cooks are busy men here at this time—January—and on till Summer. In fact they are busy all the year, but the first five or six months of the year are the busiest.

Civil engineers are not at a premium, since our schools turn them out by the score. We have here a superb school, the L. A. Polytechnic, and our Manual Arts is not far behind it. I have been told by Eastern educators that our Polytechnic ranks with the best in America.

As regards living costs, I am told by Eastern men now here, that the meals in good places here cost less than half New York prices, one said only a third as much. A friend of mine went to Boston and wrote back that it cost him easily 45% more to feed his family there.

I ate dinner with a friend who knows the East as I know my own yard and has traveled all over the world. He said, as we ate—

"You set up a meal for fifty cents that I would buy in New York at from one dollar to one-twenty-five."

He also told me that he found clothing prices very cheap and other things in proportion. Another friend, just back from Chicago, said he had a notion that he could get a tailored suit more cheaply there than here, so he made a call on a tailor and ordered two. He said he lost about twenty-four dollars on the two by not getting them here.

Rents are all prices, according to where you go and the kind of house you rent. I do not consider them high, in fact, just the reverse.

The homes of even the sewer-diggers have modern plumbing. This city has more real homes for its workers than any Eastern city of its size I ever saw and I have been in many of them. Here there are literally thousands of small cottages and bungalows, prettily built, with full modern plumbing, fireplace, gas and electricity, lawn in front and a garden in rear, occupied by laboring men and women.

I have lived in Minneapolis, Cleveland, and other towns in the Middle West, but I never saw such pretty and comfortable homes for workers there. Nor did I see anything like so many that owned their own.

## The Cook Islands

*Question:*—"I am after information regarding the Cook Islands in the Southern Pacific. What is the title of the representative of the British Crown there? How are they governed? Is the white population very numerous? Is the climate healthful? Please inform me as to the resources and industries of the islands."—"OTTAWAN," Ottawa, Canada.

*Answer*, by Mr. Mills:—The Pacific group known as the Cook Islands, annexed by New Zealand in 1900, include Rarotonga, Mangaia, Mauke, Aitutaki, Mitiaro, and Hervey Islands, Palmerston, Niue, Danger, Rakahanga, Manihiki, Penrhyn, and Suwarrow. The best known and most important of these islands are Rarotonga—which is the headquarters of the Resident Commissioner for the group and the seat of the high court—Mangaia, and Niue.

Rarotonga promises to become a very important position in the Pacific Ocean, because it is one of the stepping-stones on the greatest of all sea routes from America to New Zealand and Australia. It is also to be an important wireless station. It is easily the finest of the Cook group, both in scenic attractions and general productiveness, being a particularly good specimen of the volcanic order of islands.

The island is well watered, has a range rising over 2,000 feet above the sea level, and a belt of rich soil varying from one to two miles in width extends all 'round from the mountains to the sea. The circumference of Rarotonga is over 20 miles and the total area 16,500 acres. The coconut palm is extensively cultivated, and there is a good orange and banana trade with New Zealand, the island being particularly well suited to the growth of the banana.

The population of this center of the Cook group is something over 2,000 natives—a very gentle and kindly people, well educated by the London Missionary Society schools—and there are not more than about 100 Europeans. The Resident Commissioner is appointed by the New Zealand Government, and all the people in the group are governed by British rule, tempered, of course, by a wise and discretionary use of native customs, as is the case in New Zealand with regard to the Maori—the native race.

By the way, you will be interested to learn that there is a contingent of Maoris serving in Flanders with the New Zealanders and a contingent of Rarotongans serving with the New Zealanders in Palestine—all doing splendid war work, for they are ideal fighters. The climate of the Cook group is healthy, but, of course, it is pretty warm. Some delicate friends of mine, however, have been residents of Rarotonga these 15 years, and are doing well in health and pocket.—KIA ORA (Maori for Good Luck.)

## Trading in the Orient

*Question:*—"What are the chances of making a good living in China or Malay Peninsula, by trading, working for companies, etc.? What have you ever heard of the interior of Borneo? I have heard that it is peopled by a strange unknown race. Is this so? Are they like the Ainus or are they civilized yellow men? Do you think that the Oriental coolie laborers or labor of all kinds should be excluded from the United States? What do you know of the Senussi?"—J. O. SHAHANE, Cavalier, N. D.

*Answer*, by Mr. McCreagh:—It is difficult for me to tell yno what chances you would have of making a good living in China or the Malay States since you have not told me what your qualifications are.

If you are a skilled mechanic in any line you could get employment with one of the large firms. I might be able to give you further particulars if you would tell me what you could do.

As to trading: I would advise you and everybody else never to try to trade against the Asiatic races unless you happen to have enough capital to swamp them out. The white man can not trade in a small way against the Asiatic, for the Asiatic can outbuy him, outlie him, and undersell him every time. Remember, the Asiatic can live on about one-tenth as much as the white man, and can afford to cut his profits correspondingly. Also, there is a strong race sentiment prevalent; the Asiatic will buy from an Asiatic whenever he can in preference to a white man. No, you can't buck that game without capital.

Interior of Borneo: there has been written in past years an awful lot of hot air about the wild and mysterious people of the jungles. As a matter of fact, they are nothing more than savages in a very low state of civilization. They represent what is left of the original inhabitants; Muruts or Dusuns, they are known as, ethnologically distinct from the Dyak race. They have some queer customs, as have all savages, but there is nothing mysterious about them. They are not even cannibals, though they all collect heads, just as the Indian of this country collected scalps.

They live largely on meat, any kind of meat from iguana lizard to wild pig or dog, and they would just as soon eat it raw as not. The jungle communities are always very small; a village consists usually of a single immense hut like a barrack, with separate cubicles for each family. All the cubicles, filthy places in which ten or twenty people herd together irrespective of sex, open on to a wide sort of veranda with a hard-stamped earth floor. Where the bungalow-dweller of our Summer colonies would hang fern-pots and flowers, the junglies hang heads.

An interesting item is their coinage—or rather, the recognized medium of exchange. A large porous earthen pot is currency for one pig, or twenty chickens, or a pigskin full of yams, and so on. Another interesting fact is that all of them, from infants of three or four years of age, get periodically very drunk on a fiery liquor which they call murua or bolo which they brew in some weird way out of rice and fermenting bamboo shoots. They get drunk whenever they have a religious festival, and they hold a religious festival whenever it is necessary to propitiate any of their numerous devils who live in the trees and the streams and the rocks. Owing to this high living and to some of their queer marriage conventions they are gradually dying out—and it isn't anybody's loss either.

Do I think that Oriental coolie labor should be excluded from the U. S. A.? Yes, I do. I think that any form of labor which can underbid the white man in his own country owing to a lower scale of living should be excluded from a white man's country.

The Senussi: I can't tell you much about the Senussi except that about them too a great deal of foolishness has been written. They are a semi-political, semi-secret organization of considerable power; but there is nothing particularly mysterious about them.

If you are particularly interested, you might write to Capt. Achmed Abdullah, care of Jean Wick, Aeolian Hall, N. Y. City. He is a member of the organization and knows more about them than any man in America, as he does about most matters Oriental.

## LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

### ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN OUT OF EVERY FIVE ASKED FOR

O'BRIEN, JAMES D. Returned to the States about November 20, 1916, after spending three years in northern Alberta, Canada. Last reported seen in Seattle, Wash., where he is said to have a brother living. Connect with your old pal J. Jones; mighty important.—Address B. E. Walker, 318 3d Ave., S. L. Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

**Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.**

LOUGH, LYLE (SLIM). Over six feet and weighed about 150 pounds, dark hair and eyes. Last heard of in western Nebraska but later heard he was in California.—Address Meradith Bradley, Betrand, Nebraska.

DONALD, WILLIAM JAMES and JOHN HENRY. (Brothers.) Have not heard from them for over 25 years. Would like to hear from them.—Address Mrs. Belle Clemens, 415 E. 5th St., Santa Ana, Calif.

BATES, A. L. Last seen in El Paso, Texas. Please write your old friend Bob Kelly, care of U. S. Dredge *Guadalupe*, Galveston, Texas.

SHERMAN, COLONEL ELSWORTH. (Sometimes called "CHARLES.") Husband. Disappeared about five months ago, can find no trace of him.—Address Mrs. C. E. Sherman, 1535 Wellington Ave., Oakland, California.

M. WEST desires information about his wife. Please answer at once.—Address L. T., 367 care *Adventure.*

**Please notify us at once when you have found your man.**

MORGAN, GEORGE FRANCIS, who served in 6th U. S. Infantry and 8th Cavalry 1911 to 1915. Last heard of in the Princess Patricia's Infantry, Canadian Army 1916. Jock why don't you write your old pal Dec. at the old Barracks?—Address Dec. Bijou, L. T. 368, care *Adventure.*

HART, ALBION W. Last heard of in Juarez, Mexico, late in 1913. Age then 19, but passed as 24; large, dark, good education, and well adapted to getting along. Left El Paso, Texas, suddenly with plenty of money for interior of Mexico. Brother has important information for him. Will pay for any information regarding his present whereabouts; and also his activities during past four years.—Address Sergeant E. R. Hart, M. D. N. A., U. S. A. A. S., General Mess, Camp Crane, Allentown, Pa.

SLUDER, CHARLEY. Last heard of at Eureka, Kans., in 1908 or 1909. Heard he enlisted in the Army at Wichita a year or so later. Must be between 30 and 40 years old. Over 6 feet tall, dark hair, dark complexion and slightly bow-legged. Your "little cousin" Frank wants to hear from you. Communicate with—J. R. Hazen, U. S. S. *Illinois*, Fortress Monroe, Va.

**Please notify us at once when you have found your man.**

LOFTIS, EDWARD MARSHALL. Age 32, height 5 ft. 8 in., weight between 180 and 195, dark brown hair mixed with gray, brown eyes, light complexion, smooth shaven. Occupation, farmer. Last heard of in Iowa on Jan. 18. May be around his home in eastern Nebraska. In Barb, Thurston or Washington Counties. Reward for information.—Address 366, care of *Adventure*.

REGENER, HERMAN. Write to your friend, CHARLIE PARKHILL, at L. C. McLain Sanatorium, St. Louis, 1913—14.—Address Charlie Parkhill, 1719 Hills Avenue, Tampa, Fla.

CROUSE, SAMUEL BLAKE. Age 30 years, height about 5 ft. 7 in. Last heard of in San Francisco, Calif., about 5 years ago. Intended to go to Texas on a ranch. His relatives would like to hear from him. Please write to—Pte. M. R. Crouse, Whitby Military Hospital, Whitby, Ontario, Canada, Dorm. No. 1.

**THE following have been inquired for in full, in either the First July or Mid-July issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:**

ANDERSON, ALEX; Arbuckle, Margaret; Bell, John (Jack) Watson; Burns, Ada; Dickerson, Tommie; Fairchild, John; Granville, Richard; Hayne, Emil; Henderson, Al.; Henderson, Mrs. Edith Houston; Hilgenhurst, John (John Silvester Graegory); Jomes, R. C. (Also known as Roy Clinton); Krause, Charles; La Brache. P.; Lindegren, Miss Estell and Mr. Ernest; McGovern, John; Nelson, Erik; Niles, John Oches; Offer, George William; Rembe, Edward A.; Saltman, William; Stapleton, Bob; Tinsley, Thos. Russell; Ussher, Lionel Neville; Vance, Thad.; Wilson, Samuel William; Youker, Philip Luther (Louis).

MISCELLANEOUS—Ingelow, Crump, Empey, Thurston, Nowell, Alexander Harrifield, Cassier. Sergeant Rome and Corporal Carroll.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan; Lee Hays; Jack P. Robinson; G. W. Barrington.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address Harry Erwin Wade, care *Adventure*.

# THE TRAIL AHEAD

You lovers of the Great Outdoors will like the MID-AUGUST NUMBER, in your hands JULY 18. Besides the Novelettes and Serial, mentioned on page 2, will be eight short stories—every one dealing with remarkable deeds of strong men.

### The Great Foolishness *By Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.*

They were cousins, *John, Johann* and *Jonathan*—all great big fellows, veritable giants. And they loved *Suprema*, the woman. In which case things are bound to happen, especially when the woman is of *Suprema's* type. A desert story with a punch.

### The Ferret and the Bet *By J. Allan Dunn*

Prison doors swung open freeing *The Ferret*, cracksman and genius. "I'll bet he'll be back in six months," announced the detective wearily. And he was. Who won the bet?

### Heathens *By Gordon Young*

The clothing of civilized people does not successfully hide the evil in their hearts nor does the nakedness of savages always expose the goodness underneath the brown. A weird tale of the South Seas.

### Loco or Love *By W. C. Tuttle*

With outlaws running loose in the cow-country "*Magpie*" *Simpkins* and *Ike Harper*, sheriff and deputy, respectively, are busy men—making love to the same girl. And all Piperock think them loco, when it's only love.

### Arab *By Roy P. Churchill*

Among the new recruits on the training-ship *Dixie* are *Singleton Smith*, hobo, and *Arab*, dog. A story of that brief training period during which characters are molded by the discipline of the Navy.

### For the Flag *A Four-Part Story Conclusion* *By Thomas Addison*

The conspirators, driven to desperation, make another hazardous effort to precipitate hostilities between Zanhoria, the Central American republic, and the United States.

### Blood of the Allisons *By Hapsburg Liebe*

"*Buck*" *Newland* is only a boy—just eleven. But a nervy one nevertheless. You'll like him. Dealing with the precocious youngsters of the Tennessee hills the writer is at his best.

### The Better Mixer *By Russell A. Boggs*

You've met *J. Reilly* before. The plucky station-agent is sent to Billups by his railroad to mix things with the mixer.

### A New Keeper of the Wampum *By Hugh Pendexter*

Wo to those who rashly meddle with the sacred wampum of the Indians. A story of hazardous days during the Revolutionary period.

# MID-AUGUST ADVENTURE

# How I Improved My Memory In One Evening

## The Amazing Experience of Victor Jones

"Of *course* I place you! Mr. Addison Sims of Seattle.

"If I remember correctly—and I *do* remember correctly—Mr. Burroughs, the lumberman, introduced me to you at the luncheon of the Seattle Rotary Club three years ago in May. This is a pleasure indeed! I haven't laid eyes on you since that day. How is the grain business? And how did that amalgamation work out?"

The assurance of the speaker—in the crowded corridor of the Hotel McAlpin—compelled me to turn and look at him, though I must say it is not my usual habit to "listen in" even in a hotel lobby.

"He is David M. Roth, the most famous memory expert in the United States," said my friend Kennedy, answering my question before I could get it out. "He will show you a lot more wonderful things than that, before the evening is over."

And he did.

As we went into the banquet room the toastmaster was introducing a long line of guests to Mr. Roth. I got in line and when it came my turn, Mr. Roth asked, "What are your initials, Mr. Jones, and your business connection and telephone number?" Why he asked this I learned later, when he picked out from the crowd the 60 men he had met two hours before and called each by name without a mistake. What is more, he named each man's business and telephone number, for good measure.

I won't tell you all the other amazing things this man did except to tell how he called back, without a minute's hesitation, long lists of numbers, bank clearings, prices, lot numbers, parcel post rates and anything else the guests had given him in rapid order.

* * * * * *

When I met Mr. Roth again—which you may be sure I did the first chance I got—he rather bowled me over by saying, in his quiet, modest way:

"There is nothing miraculous about my remembering anything I want to remember, whether it be names, faces, figures, facts or something I have read in a magazine.

"*You can do this just as easily as I do.* Anyone with an average mind can learn quickly to do exactly the same things which seem so miraculous when I do them.

"My own memory," continued Mr. Roth, "was originally very faulty. Yes it was—a really *poor* memory. On meeting a man I would lose his name in thirty seconds, while now there are probably 10,000 men and women in the United States, many of whom I have met but once, whose names I can tell instantly on meeting them."

"That is all right for you, Mr. Roth," I interrupted, "you have given years to it. But how about me?"

"Mr. Jones," he replied, "I can teach you the secret of a good memory in one evening. This is not a guess, because I have done it with thousands of pupils. In the first of seven simple lessons which I have prepared for home study, I show you the basic principle of my whole system and you will find it—not hard work as you might fear—but just like playing a fascinating game. I will prove it to you."

He didn't have to prove it. His Course did; I got it the very next day from his publishers, the Independent Corporation.

When I tackled the first lesson, I suppose I was the most surprised man in forty-eight states to find that I had learned in about one hour—how to remember a list of one hundred words so that I could call them off forward and back without a single mistake.

That first lesson *stuck.* And so did the other six.

Read this letter from C. Louis Allen, who at 32 years is president of a million dollar corporation, the Pyrene Manufacturing Company of New York, makers of the famous fire extinguisher:

> "Now that the Roth Memory Course is finished, I want to tell you how much I have **enjoyed** the study of this most fascinating subject. Usually these courses involve a great deal of drudgery, but this has been nothing but pure **pleasure** all the way through. I have derived much benefit from taking the course of instruction and feel that I shall continue to strengthen my memory. That is the best part of it. I shall be glad of an opportunity to recommend your work to my friends."

Mr. Allen didn't put it a bit too strong. The Roth Course is priceless! I can absolutely *count* on my memory now. I can call the name of most any man I have met before—and I am getting better all the time. I can remember any figures I wish to remember. Telephone numbers come to mind instantly, once I have filed them by Mr. Roth's easy method. Street addresses are just as easy.

The old fear of forgetting (you know what that is) has vanished. I used to be "scared stiff" on my feet—because I wasn't *sure.* I couldn't remember what I wanted to say.

Now I am sure of myself, and confident and "easy as an old shoe" when I get on my feet at the club, or at a banquet, or in a business meeting, or in any social gathering.

Perhaps the most enjoyable part of it all is that I have become a good conversationalist—and I used to be as silent as a sphinx when I got into a crowd of people who knew things.

Now I can call up like a flash of lightning most any fact I want right at the instant I need it most. I used to think a "hair trigger" memory belonged only to the prodigy and genius. Now I see that every man of us has that kind of a memory if he only knows how to make it work right.

I tell you it is a wonderful thing, after groping around in the dark for so many years to be able to switch the big searchlight on your mind and see instantly everything you want to remember.

This Roth Course **will do** wonders in your office.

Since we took it up you never hear anyone in *our* office say "I guess" or "I think it was about so much" or "I forget that right now" or "I can't remember" or "I must look up his name." Now they are right there with the answer—like a shot.

Have you ever heard of "Multigraph" Smith? Real name H. Q. Smith, Division Manager of the Multigraph Sales Company, Ltd., in Montreal. Here is just a bit from a letter of his that I saw last week:

> "Here is the whole thing in a nutshell: Mr. Roth has a most remarkable Memory Course. It is simple, and easy as falling off a log. Yet with one hour a day of practice anyone—I don't care who he is—can improve his Memory 100% in a week and 1,000% in six months."

My advice to you is don't wait another minute. Send to Independent Corporation for Mr. Roth's amazing course and see what a wonderful memory you have got. Your dividends in *increased earning power* will be enormous.

VICTOR JONES

### Send No Money

So confident is the Independent Corporation, the publishers of the Roth Memory Course, that once you have an opportunity to see in your own home how easy it is to double, yes, triple your memory power in a few short hours, that they are willing to send the course on free examination.

Don't send any money. Merely mail the coupon or write a letter and the complete course will be sent, all charges prepaid, at once. If you are not entirely satisfied send it back any time within five days after you receive it and you will owe nothing.

On the other hand, if you are as pleased as are the thousands of other men and women who have used the course send only $5 in full payment. You take no risk and you have everything to gain, so mail the coupon now before this remarkable offer is withdrawn.

**FREE EXAMINATION COUPON**

**Independent Corporation**

**Division of Business Education,**
**Dept. Q, 119 West 40th St., New York.**

*Publishers of The Independent, "The Most Satisfactory War Journal in America."*

Please send me the Roth Memory Course of seven lessons. I will either remail the course to you within five days after its receipt or send you $5.

Name ..................................

Address ..................................

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Adv. 8-3-18

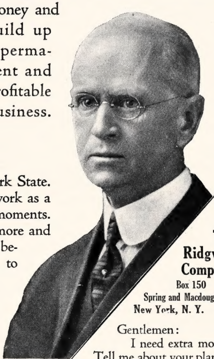
# How Can I Earn More Money?

## Let us solve your problem

We have solved the money problem for hundreds of men and women. To-day they are confident and comfortable. They are earning $10—$20—$40—$100 a month extra.

Your spare time is all you need. That is the great feature of this opportunity. You can make money *in addition* to what your regular occupation pays you. Our work is so elastic that it fits into any one's day, and there is no limit to what you can earn. It is simply a question of how much money you want.

We pay you liberally for looking after our new and renewal subscriptions to *Adventure, Everybody's Magazine* and *The Delineator.* Besides cash commission, you have a monthly or weekly salary if you want it. Sell us your spare time. Turn minutes into money and build up a permanent and profitable business.



## You can do it!

Mr. Fred L. Barney lives in upper New York State. Fifteen years ago he took up subscription work as a side-line—just to "try it out" in his odd moments. He found it paid. Gradually he became more and more absorbed. His subscription business, besides supporting a family, has enabled him to send his two sons to college.

What Mr. Barney has done, others have done also.

This is your opportunity to increase your income easily and surely. Experience is not necessary. We tell you how and furnish everything free.

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